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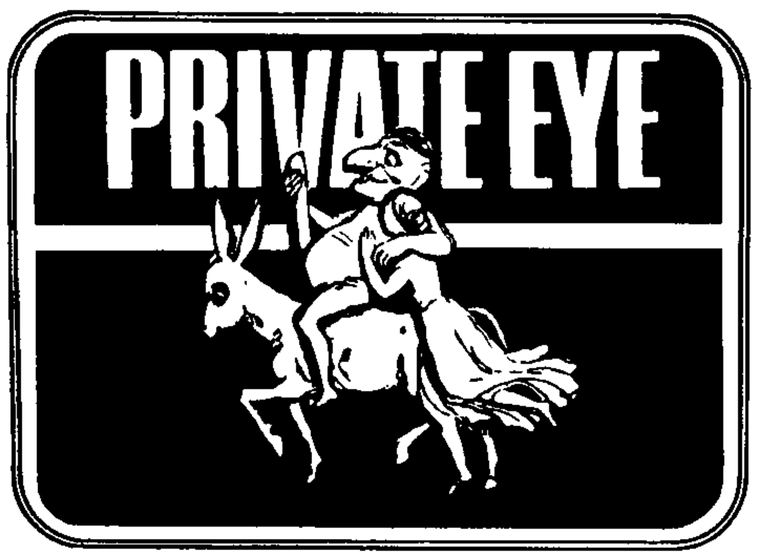

PUBLIC accounting for the private finance initiative has again been exposed as a sham by new revelations that billions of pounds of PFI debts have been incorrectly omitted from government borrowing figures for years.

Critics have long claimed that by replacing conventional borrowing and ownership of public facilities with agreements to pay for using them over decades, the burden on taxpayers is masked for years to come.

"New" Labour ministers have routinely dismissed this by pointing out that, although some PFI deals are "off balance sheet" (so that the asset and related liabilities stay off the books), most are "on balance sheet" and thus increase government liabilities.

Two years ago the then treasury chief secretary Paul Boateng responded to criticisms from a number of MPs (notably Tory Mark Hoban, who famously referred to Gordon Brown as the Enron chancellor) that PFI was inappropriately reducing government debt by telling the PFI Congress: "The allegation is that the government uses PFI to hide its liabilities off balance sheet, so as to disguise public spending. I am glad to have the opportunity to expose that misrepresentation, yet again… The government has no need to conceal our investment or our future liabilities," adding that "far from using PFI to keep liabilities off balance sheet, as PFI's critics argue, 57 percent of all PFI investment by capital value, is in fact on balance sheet."

Then a few months after Boateng's speech, in what remains the only occasion on which he has answered questions in parliament on PFI, the chancellor responded to Tory spokesman Howard Flight by repeating Boateng's figures: "Fifty-seven percent of PFI projects are on balance sheet, not off balance sheet".

It has now emerged from the office of national statistics (ONS) that, contrary to the government's assurances, even the liabilities associated with the 57 percent of PFI deals classified as "on balance sheet" have *not* been included in public sector borrowing figures. These deals could amount to anything up to £25bn of extra public borrowing (although the ONS says it will take a few months to work out exactly how much), taking government debt perilously close to Gordon Brown's self-imposed borrowing limits and exploding the fiction that the government's programme of investment comes without a substantial increase in liabilities.

The ONS admits that it has known about the error since 2001. As this office is an agency of the treasury, the inevitable question is: why do treasury ministers appear not to have known about the multi-billion pound hole in the government's figures? Or, if they did, why did they repeatedly conceal it? So much for Gordon Brown's reputation for prudence…

BRITISH Petroleum chairman Sir John Browne has longed complained that British oil companies should be given a fairer share of the lucrative Iraqi oil business – with little joy as the Americans have handed the big contracts to their own firms.

He will be expecting a change in fortunes, however, with his recent appointment of Sir Jeremy Greenstock as a special adviser.

Greenstock is extremely well connected in Washington since his stint as Britain's ambassador to the United Nations in the run up to the Iraq war and was instrumental in securing the security council resolution that was to become the pretext for military action.

When Saddam was toppled Greenstock became the prime minister's special envoy in Iraq. But by last August he seemed to have lost some of his enthusiasm for the occupation, declaring that: "If Iraq in 2006 looks very little better than under Saddam, then the whole thing was a waste of lives, money and effort." Unless of course you get a handy oil consultancy position out of it, in which case 2006 could be very prosperous indeed.

EUROPE – STRAW SPELLS IT OUT

OF THE 22 countries that have so far ratified the United Nations convention against corruption, how many are members of the G8? Er, none.

The world leaders publicly pledged themselves to the convention, which will create international rules for the handling of corruption, at their 2003 jamboree in Evian, France. Ratification was one of the recommendations of Tony Blair's Africa Commission. But when will it be ratified?

"Soon," promise minister after minister when questions are raised in parliament, explaining the need for "orders in council" to ensure that the UK's proceeds of crime act and other laws fit together with the convention's rules on confiscated funds. "Later this year," is the current prediction of when the legislation will be ready.

The convention needs 30 ratifications to come into force. If the rest of the world reaches that tally before *any* of the G8 countries gets their act together, how on Earth can the rich nations' club claim to be tackling the problems of corruption crippling developing world economies?

FORMER *Sun* editor turned PR suit David Yelland popped up in the *Observer's* Media Business pages on 29 May to outline how he and his fellow members of the Puttnam Commission believed the public profile of parliament could be improved. Unsurprisingly, Yelland believed it had much to do with spin. "If you take a look at leading companies, whether they be BP or Tesco, Coca-Cola or British Airways, they all communicate superbly."

Students of Yelland, if such people exist, may have heard an echo of his piece for the *Grauniad* last December. "*Standard Lite* isn't perfect, no new launch ever is, but it isn't bad and I think we may be seeing the way of the future," he wrote of the *Evening Standard*'s new freesheet. "In every other business sector, marketers have responded to tough competition with new products – Coca-Cola has Diet Coke…"

A couple of weeks after that article, Coca-Cola gave a £350,000 account to PR firm Weber Shandwick to "rebuild relations with the media" after the Dasani bottled-water fiasco. The senior vice-chairman of Weber Shandwick in charge of the account, who now rejoices in the title of "chief media officer" for Coke, is a certain D. Yelland. Yet for some reason – characteristic bashfulness, no doubt – his recent *Observer* article omitted to mention that the man in charge of Coke's "superb" communications is, er, himself.

WHAT could be more embarrassing? Richard "Dirty" Desmond's newspapers, stalwart champions of law 'n' order, may themselves now be prosecuted for making money from a criminal drug-pushing enterprise.

Not that Dirty Des is the only offender. The *Sunday Mirror* and *People*, like Des's *Express* and *Star* titles, have also been carrying adverts recently offering a "Genuine Blue V Pill – 16 Pills Only £32". Readers who visit the web address in the ad will learn that the pill in question, Kamagra, is a Viagra copy – "a generic product with the same active ingredient for erectile dysfunction using the active ingredient sildenafil citrate". What they won't learn is that it's illegal. Sildenafil citrate is indeed the active ingredient in Viagra, but (because of its possible side-effects) it is meant to be prescribed only after a thorough medical examination.

As we pointed out a year ago (*Eye* 1109), it is an offence under the health and medicines act 1988 to supply prescription-only drugs – whether generic or not – through mail-order ads such as this. Anyone doing so faces an unlimited fine and two years in prison.

Customs officers regularly intercept parcels from India, where Kamagra is made. On the streets of Britain, particularly in Scotland, drug-dealers sell the pills alongside cocaine, heroin and ecstasy. The trade has become a multi-million pound criminal business. And, amazing to relate, it's being aided and abetted by national newspapers. No doubt Dirty Des, and Sly Bailey at the Mirror Group, will be happy to help Inspector Knacker with his inquiries.

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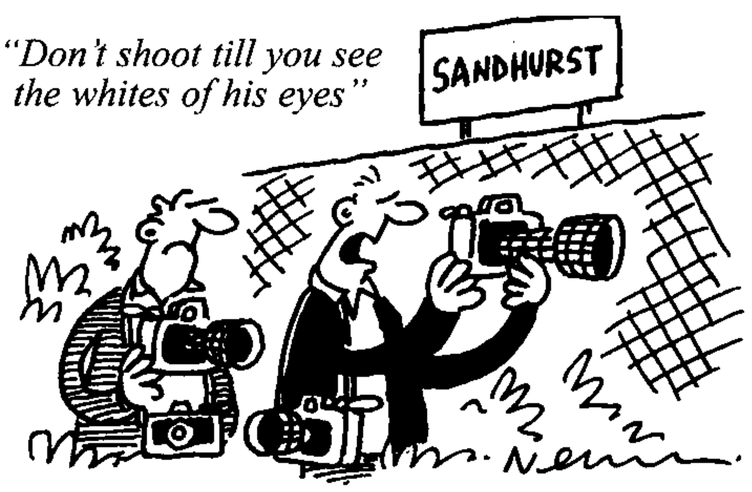

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Street Of Shame

ANOTHER sensational *Sunday Times* scoop. "The identity of the secret agent who assassinated Georgi Markov, the Bulgarian dissident, with a poison pellet umbrella in Waterloo Bridge in London has finally been revealed," it announced last weekend. The culprit was Francesco Giullino, a Dane of Italian origin who worked for the Bulgarian secret service and had the codename "Agent Piccadilly".

This isn't the first time Giullino has been named as the umbrella-wielding assassin. He was identified back in the mid-1990s by two Hungarian authors, Vlado Bereanu and Kalin Todorov, who also gave his codename and all the other details "revealed" last weekend. Their findings were reported on 26 January 1997 in a news-story in… the *Sunday Times*!

THE *Observer* was cock-a-hoop about its exclusive interview last Sunday with footballer of the moment, Ashley Cole. But the feature nearly fell through.

Cole had initially agreed to do the interview on the proviso that the *Obs* kit him out in a Prada suit. No problems there until he said that he wanted to keep the suit and asked the newspaper to take care of the matter. Prada wasn't prepared to play ball so editors were left frantically asking favours from other designers to keep the Arsenal footballer happy. He eventually walked off with a £1,000 suit from Paul Smith.

Ashley Cole earns £50,000 a week. In his *Observer* photo last weekend he wore not only the suit but a wristband proclaiming… Make Poverty History.

THE extraordinary survival powers of Dominic Lawson are being stretched to the limit now that he has managed to antagonise both his new managing director and his new proprietor.

The MD, Murdoch MacLennan, is livid at Lawson's recent sacking of *Sunday Telegraph* managing editor Con Coughlin. MacLennan and Coughlin worked together at the *Reading Evening Post* many years ago, and enjoyed a most convivial lunch only a week or so before Lawson gave Coughlin his cards. The cash-strapped *Torygraph* then had to give the long-serving hack a pay-off not unadjacent to £200,000, leaving the MD even more furious.

Meanwhile Sir David Barclay has sent Lawson a stern letter complaining about his decision, on the very Sunday the front page was filled with news of the Pope's death, to run a news story inside headlined "Jesus Might Have Been Homosexual, Says the First Openly Gay Bishop". Perhaps it had slipped Dominic's memory that his new owners are devout Catholics, but Barclay has now reminded him forcibly. Any more cock-ups like that and it may be Lawson's turn to clear his desk.

NO ONE could say the *Guardian* didn't get its money's worth from its sponsorship of the Hay-on-Wye literary festival.

The paper crammed no fewer than 56 pieces plugging the festival into its pages during its nine-day run, more than three times as many as referred to the possibly more significant summer shebang, Live 8.

Indeed, on the day the line-up for Bob Geldof's series of concerts was announced, the *Graun* devoted just 1,000 words to it – as opposed to the 3,000 it spent dissecting the schedule for Glastonbury, a festival which happens to be sponsored by… the *Guardian*.

"IT IS hard not to feel a slight pang of disappointment that the identity of Deep Throat has been exposed at last," a *Grauniad* editorial sighs.

Disappointment? Shouldn't the *Grauniad* be rejoicing at its prescience? Back in May 2002 its correspondent Matthew Engel reported that "one of the most mysterious figures in American political history [Deep Throat] may finally have been revealed… Mark Felt, a former assistant director of the FBI."

Alas! Only a month later, on 18 June 2002, the *Grauniad* lost its nerve and published a long list of other likely suspects, including former Nixon aides Pat Buchanan, Ray Brice, Steve Bull and Ron Ziegler. And in July 2004, just to confuse readers further, the paper reported that "one of the longest-running mysteries of American politics may soon be resolved after it was announced yesterday that the man many suspect of being Deep Throat in the Watergate scandal had died". The man in question was, er, Fred LaRue.

Another hack who blew his chance of saying "I told you so" is Ben Macintyre of the *Times*, whose 30th-anniversary piece in May 2002 listed Mark Felt as one of the "credible suspects", Alas again! Macintyre concluded with this confident assertion: "Deep Throat has clearly decided to take his secret to the grave."

Meanwhile at the *Observer*, eminence grise Peter Preston, ex-editor of the *Grauniad,* waxed sorrowful in his media column over Deep Throat's exposure after more than 30 years. "So the romance that launched countless copy-cat investigations blows away (as book offers to Bob Woodward and the family Felt pour in)," he mused. "For idealism, read cash and calculation. For heroism, read ambition and anger. Another good reason for never revealing your sources."

The principled Preston was quick to show his own heroism in 1983 when he handed back to the government leaked papers which revealed civil servant Sarah Tisdall as the source of a *Guardian* story about Greenham Common. Tisdall spent six months in prison as a result.

JESSICA CALLAN of the *Mirror*'s 3am gossip column recently popped into the forums on ex-Spice Girl Geri Halliwell's official internet site to request that fans stop bombarding the *Mirror* with emails complaining about its coverage of the ginger whinger.

"Please if you are going to email us – check your spelling. grammar and content of your message," she instructed them. "Otherwise we'll delete your messages as we don't have time to read nonsense emails."

She also penned a defence of the column's position which, if nothing else, gives an insight into the challenge faced by *Mirror* sub-editors: "Geri is past it and todays audience has voted by not buying tickets to Geri's gig. We admire her staminer and staying power… We all bearly watched her documentary and it's just underlined what we know… If you do have any real gossip about real stars then do email us."

LAST WEEK saw two spectacular showbiz scoops – the *Sun*'s Sara Nathan breathlessly reported on Friday that "Cult gangster drama *The Sopranos* is to return for a sixth series I can reveal" – only two years after US network HBO announced that this was the case (its June 2003 announcement was reported by the *Daily Star*, *Guardian*, *Mirror* and, er, *Sun*).

She was, however, beaten in the topicality stakes by the *Daily Record*'s Beverley Lyons, who revealed exclusively last Tuesday that internet auction site eBay had banned the sale of some knickers worn by Madonna because their vendor, strip-club owner Tony Cochrane, could not prove they had been washed. That story is a mere four years old, having first appeared – beneath a slightly more convincing "Exclusive" banner – in the *Sun* in July 2001.

IN HIS regular column for the Scottish edition of the *Mail on Sunday* (which he retains despite declining to run again as an MP in Glasgow at the last election), George Galloway recalled a trip to Malawi he took long before the Scottish first minister's recent visit.

"I was one of the last men to meet the late Dr Hastings Banda, long-time dictator of Malawi, the breathtakingly beautiful land by Lake Victoria where most of the poor take their last breath around the age of 40," gorgeous George recalled.

Of course the more dictators one hangs out with, the more difficult it becomes to tell them apart; but someone at the *Mail* might have seen fit to point out to the MP for Bethnal Green and Bow that the largest lake in Malawi is called, er, Lake Malawi, and if he was sitting on the shore of Lake Victoria he was more likely to have been saluting the indefatigability of Uganda's Idi Amin.

Public 'mast' debate
Church plans under attack
Holme Valley Express

IN HIS farewell column for the *Evening Standard*, good European Piers Moron sobbed over the result of the French referendum.

"The victory for the anti-Europeans shows that xenophobia still reigns supreme in most of Europe's great countries. Until a sensible debate can be had without all the neo-racists screaming about 'filthy frogs' and 'revolting rosbifs' then integration remains a pipedream… Today the Little Frenchmen and Little Englanders are rejoicing. But I wonder if they will be in 50 years' time, when the folly of their behaviour becomes clearer."

Even Moron, however, would have to admit that things have improved over the last decade. It is, after all, a mere nine years since the editor of one of the UK's leading tabloids thought it appropriate to decorate his front page with pictures of English footballers in World War Two-style tin helmets and the headline "ACHTUNG! SURRENDER – FOR YOU, FRITZ, ZE EURO 96 CHAMPIONSHIP IS OVER". Piers Moron – for it was he – spotted the folly of his own behaviour rather more quickly.

Meanwhile,the first setback has occured for Piers Morgan in his new identity as proprietor of *Press Gazette*.

Moron wanted to install Lisa O'Carroll, editor of the *Media Guardian's* website, as editor of the title but she wisely decided that a return to her native Ireland would be preferable to having Moron's monumental ego looming over here. Who will be brave enough now to step into the hot seat?

HAS THERE ever been a greater triumph of hope over experience than the news that David "Rommel" Montgomery's Mecom investment vehicle has raised £400m to spend on buying newspapers – with the *Daily Mirror* and its sister-papers apparently the likeliest target?

Yes, the same *Daily Mirror* from which he was sacked seven years ago after it had lost 500,000 readers under his deranged command.

Rommel's return to the news business began last year when, with backing from 3i, he regained control of the unionist *Belfast Newsletter* and nationalist *Derry Journal*, which he'd previously purchased during his disastrous reign at the Mirror Group. The papers were flogged off by Trinity Mirror's current, hopeless CEO Sly Bailey in an (also hopeless) attempt to shore up the group's share price. After winning them back, Montgomery's consortium promised massive improvements in efficiency and new launches under his dynamic control.

Sure enough, on 4 April a new title hit the news-stands. *Daily View* was heavily promoted on radio, TV and billboards as a fresh, non-sectarian *Mirror*-style tabloid for the whole of Northern Ireland. It staggered on until 6 May, when the axe fell after catastrophic sales and the entire workforce was sacked.

Montgomery's minions at Local Press Ltd have, naturally, declined to say how much of 3i's money was wasted on a newspaper so poorly thought-out that it lasted only a month. Why those putting money into Mecom expect a different outcome from a successful bid for the *Mirror* titles is a mystery.

Number Crunchings

-7% ■ Fall in *Daily Mirror* readership last year

+14% ■ Rise in pay packet of Sly Bailey, CEO of Trinity Mirror last year

RELATIONS between classical music professionals and the arts editor of the *Independent*, David Lister, have deteriorated so badly now there is even talk of a boycott of the paper. How so?

Lister, known unaffectionately to staff and writers as Blister, treats PRs, press officers and freelancers with contempt, wasting their time, reneging on agreements and cancelling commissions. And he gets music critics to write features or review concerts, allowing them to incur expenses, before deciding he doesn't want the piece, refusing not only to pay for the work but to reimburse the costs.

Of late Blister has even picked a row with the (hugely efficient) Proms press office, informing it grandly (and absurdly) *that the* Proms would henceforth be ignored by the *Independent* arts pages. His daft threat was of course withdrawn. He's also had the Barbican running around to set up interviews with star musicians that were then peremptorily dropped. He's tried (unsuccessfully) to sack the paper's much-admired chief music critic Bayan Northcott for no reason, after 18 years of service.

Various of his victims – PRs, agents, writers et al – have now discussed the possibility of freezing out the *Indie*'s art pages for as long as Lister stays in charge of them.

Undeterred, Lister recently had a rant against Grange Park Opera, declaiming that on no account was there to be any coverage of Grange Park this year. The diktat was withdrawn as soon as it was pointed out that Wasfi Kani, chatelaine of Grange Park, lives with Ivan Fallon, chief executive of Independent Newspapers.

HACKWATCH

Denis Balls

LIKE any good sporting performer, the *Observer*'s chief sports reporter Denis Campbell is nothing if not consistent. Why, then, is he known in the trade as "Eddie the Eagle"? Because Campbell's most consistent habit is taking flyers and then crashing to the ground…

17 October 1999: "Wembley's futuristic new stadium will be far bigger than planned," Campbell reveals in a front-page exclusive. "The rebuilt ground will hold 101,000, an increase of 11,000 on the figure announced when plans were unveiled in July." Better still, this "will also provide a massive boost for Britain's chances of staging the Olympic Games". Alas! The stadium is now due to open next year with just 90,000 seats (as intended all along), and there are no plans to use it as the main venue in London's 2012 Olympic bid.

6 February 2000: Campbell reveals that sports drug testing is to be run by a new agency. "UK Sport chief executive Richard Callicott flies to Canada today to see how things are working after the Canadians took drug-testing away from their sports council and handed it to a separate body," he reports. "A British equivalent, taking the ethics and anti-doping department at UK Sport headed by the redoubtable Michelle Verroken as its nucleus, is on its way." Five years later, no such thing has happened, and Callicott and Verroken have both departed UK Sport.

19 March 2000: "Move over David Beckham, look out Michael Owen," Campbell warns. "The Football Association has pledged to set up a full-time professional league of women's teams within three years to capitalise on the sport's booming popularity. Millions of pounds will be spent, television will screen fixtures and dozens of women will be able to give up their day job to concentrate on proving they are as skilful as Alan Shearer or Ryan Giggs." Five years on, there are still no professional teams, let alone a professional league. When Arsenal won the FA Women's Premier League Cup 3-0 against Charlton this year, they did so in front of nearly empty stands at the less-than-glamorous Griffin Park, Brentford.

31 December 2000: Back to Wembley, where it seems another plan has been hatched: "Wembley's twin towers stadium could survive as the home of English football – but only if it shrinks to 55,000 seats and stays closed until 2007." Or not, as it transpires.

21 January 2001: Three weeks later, and the uncertainty is getting to the hapless hack. "Wembley's future becomes, paradoxically, both clearer and more confusing by the week," he wails.

30 September 2001: Maybe Campbell's predictive talents will prove more successful in cricket. "As Tory prime minister, John Major presided over crucial Cabinet meetings, made peace with the IRA and attended summits of fellow world leaders. But now he is in line for the job he really coveted during his rise to power… The ex-Premier has emerged as the frontrunner to become the next chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board." No one else picks up the story, probably because it's nonsense.

4 November 2001: Back to Wembley: "The scene of English football's greatest World Cup triumph in 1966 will not be rebuilt, under plans to be discussed this week by the Football Association."

27 January 2002: "English and Scottish clubs will play each other every year in a new British Cup designed to revive interest in the ailing League Cups in both countries," Campbell discloses. "Although the two competitions will not merge until mid-2003, four or six top Scottish clubs – including Celtic and Rangers – will compete in next season's Worthington Cup as a dry run for the British Cup." We're still waiting.

27 October 2002: London won't bid for the 2012 Olympics after all. "Ministers fear it could turn into a financial and political fiasco," Campbell explains. "Senior government figures believe hosting the games in London in 2012 would lead to transport chaos, endless cost overruns and the building of a 'white elephant' stadium."

15 December 2002: Just over a month later, Campbell has clearly found himself another source: "Up to £1 billion of National Lottery money will be used to build sports facilities to allow London to host the 2012 Olympic Games."

22 December 2002. A week later, and Campbell's back on the front page under the headline "Britain's Olympics bid 'to be scrapped'." Attempts to bring the 2012 games to London "appeared doomed to fail last night because Tony Blair fears a campaign to attract them would cost too much and lead to endless negative headlines," he reveals.

12 January 2003: Campbell turns to cricket, but his crystal ball bowls him a googly. "The International Cricket Council, the sport's global governing body, confirmed yesterday it would move all six World Cup matches out of Zimbabwe if growing security problems meant players' safety could not be guaranteed." In fact, the ICC didn't move any fixtures out of Zimbabwe, and the far bigger story – unforeseen by Campbell – was that England opted out of its matches in Harare.

13 June 2004: It's Euro 2004, so Denis is on hoolie watch with England's fans in Portugal. "Police are hunting a hardcore group of banned football hooligans who they fear have managed to sneak into Portugal to carry out attacks on rival fans ahead of tonight's game." Oddly, there is no follow-up report the next week after the matches pass off peacefully.

23 January 2005: "Yachtswoman Ellen MacArthur is set to be defeated in her attempt to set a new record for sailing around the world single-handedly," Campbell predicts – days before she duly breaks the record.

29 May 2005: "Premiership clubs could receive four points for an away win under plans to be discussed by team bosses who want to make games more entertaining." Campbell's sources for the scoop are "several club chairmen and chief executives". Come the meeting, those chairmen and CEOs must have forgotten all about it. Or were they by any chance teasing the poor hack by feeding him a dud? Surely not.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Barnsley is the new Tuscany." – *Guardian.*

"Ladders are the new sugar." – *Jo Whiley, Radio 1.*

"Is Google the new God?" – *Times online.*

"Are Wednesdays the new Sundays?" – *Sunday Telegraph.*

"Are rental regulations the new speed cameras?" – *1066 Property Guide.*

"The single currency is Europe's New Coke." – *Guardian.*

"Checking your inbox is the new going out." – *Guardian.*

IN THE TEAROOM

JUST as they're committed to widening choice in health and education, the Tories seem set to extend the principle to their own leadership election.

An astonishing number of MPs, after sober consideration, have concluded that they hear a faint voice that just might be the call of destiny. In most cases they're not actually throwing their hats into the ring quite yet, but they're content to allow friends to signal their availability for the top job.

Often it's a mystery to whom they think they could conceivably appeal. Liam Fox and Tim Yeo, for instance, presumably imagine that that there are people out their who share their estimation of their own talents. But each is likely to find that they're reaching out to a constituency of one. And what is the point of Sir Malcolm Rifkind? Has Michael Howard's leadership been so successful that it warrants a repeat of the experiment with only a slight variation? Is there really a groundswell of nostalgia for the great days of the Major administration?

Rumours that Michael Ancram will volunteer to leave his club chair to serve his party in its hour of need have a certain whimsical charm. The David Davis camp make much of their candidate's council house origins, his spell in the TA SAS and his willingness to play political hardball. It's cheering to know there may still be some Tories who think the oiks have had quite enough turns already– Heath, Thatcher, Major, Hague and Howard – and it would be altogether more agreeable to be led by an amiable old toff who wouldn't say boo to a goose.

More serious, though, has been the late emergence of David "Two-Brains" Willetts. While he knows in his heart that he is not really prime minister material, he also knows that it's not outrageously conceited of him to nurse the hope of one day being chancellor of the exchequer. For years he has suffered the irritation of seeing lesser and stupider men scrambling past him. Now he must act, but not as candidate, rather as kingmaker.

Willetts commands the respect of that generation of Tory MPs who all went to Oxford and Cambridge in the late 1970s. Soon they'll be 50 and they haven't been in a cabinet – not at all what they planned back in the glory days at the union.

Straight after the election, Oliver Letwin tried to rally them behind Andrew Lansley, but it didn't work. Each was manoeuvring for his or her personal advantage. But in the tearoom and the smoking room it's beginning to sink in that unless they pick someone who can actually beat Gordon Brown, their political careers will have been pretty pointless. If they act together, they can seriously influence the outcome. So, who has the better chance of trumping Gordon: David Davis or Kenneth Clarke? That's the question. All the rest is vanity.

'Quintus Slide'

IN THE last *Eye* we noted that Nadine Dorries, the new Conservative MP for Mid Bedfordshire, was parachuted into the constituency at the last minute by Conservative central office, just as she was parachuted into Hazel Grove (to the fury of local Tories) shortly before the 2001 election.

Why, we asked, is she always first choice for the parachute jump when Tory HQ in London decides to despatch its own candidate?

Many thanks to all those readers who wrote in to point out that Nadine Dorries's children were until recently classmates at Ampleforth College with the children of one Trish Morris. As fellow-parents Trish and Nadine got to know each other rather well. And who is Trish? Under her more formal moniker of Baroness Morris, she is vice-chairman of the Conservative party in charge of candidate selection!

Now for the next mystery. In her manifesto for Mid Bedfordshire, Nadine Dorries said she has been married to her husband for over 30 years. Yet when she stood for Hazel Grove, just four years ago, she gave her name as Nadine Bargery. Why the sudden change?

IF THERE was any doubt that the Tories are now truly scraping the bottom of the barrel, it is dispelled by the news that the blithering Julian Brazier, MP for Canterbury, has been appointed shadow minister for transport.

This is in very questionable taste since Brazier does indeed have some knowledge of transport. In August 2001, near his family's holiday home in Siena, he killed an Italian motorcyclist.

Brazier admitted that he was driving on the wrong side of the road – "every English driver's nightmare" – when he hit 42-year old Carlo Civitelli while rounding a sharp bend. In mitigation he pointed out that it was a hot afternoon and he had just driven 1,200 miles from England: "Suddenly finding yourself on the wrong side of the road is so easy to do." Scant consolation for the family of Civitelli, whose wife had died of cancer three years earlier and whose baby had been aborted because of her illness.

Brazier, a law 'n' order fanatic, did not end up serving time in an Italian jail for manslaughter, as some of his constituents had expected and hoped. On the advice of his lawyer, he didn't even attend the court hearing. He was given a four-month suspended sentence and banned from driving in Italy for six months.

THERE was a brief tabloid frenzy two weeks ago when it was revealed that the new Conservative MP for Croydon Central, Andrew Pelling, was having an affair with a Tory activist half his age. But it seems this isn't his only eyebrow-raising relationship.

On election night Pelling thanked the voters "who have placed a great trust in me". But in whom has he placed his own trust? He has just hired the self-promoting "PR expert" Marianne Bowness – who won a sterling 304 votes (just ahead of the Official Monster Raving Loonies) standing as the Veritas candidate in, er, Croydon Central.

Bowness previously worked as personal assistant to the former champion boxer Winston Mackenzie, who stood for Veritas in neighbouring Croydon North but has now stormed out of the party and denounced Robert Kilroy-Silk as a preening egomaniac. Perhaps the ever-charitable Pelling will now hire Mackenzie as a bodyguard, to protect him from the wrath of his constituents – and his furious wife.

THE advisory committee on business appointments has, without prompting, sent *Private Eye* all its correspondence with former home secretary David Blunkett over his extra-parliamentary employment.

The letters contain a rare apology from Blunkett – after repeated reminders from the committee that his new part-time job needed vetting – and a clear statement that Blunkett breached the ministerial code.

After resigning as home secretary Blunkett took a new job with Indepen Consulting Ltd "giving seminars on relationship between government and business". However, as the *Eye* revealed (1132), he did not get clearance from the anti-sleaze committee, whose head, Lord Mayhew, wrote to Blunkett twice.

On both occasions Mayhew reminded Blunkett that the ministerial code, introduced by Tony Blair in 2001, said ex-ministers should refer new jobs to the committee for advice. The second letter was prompted by press coverage of Blunkett's new job with Indepen.

Blunkett eventually replied: "It was my belief that I should seek your advice if I had any doubt about the nature of the employment and its connection with my role as a government minister." It seems Blunkett believed that only Blunkett should decide when Blunkett needed advice. He did, however, offer his apologies to the committee.

The *Eye* asked the cabinet office for guidance and it would seem that the code is in not in fact enforced. Ministers themselves are "personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the code" and only the prime minister can hold a minister to account on the code. So even though Blunkett clearly breached the rules, he faces no penalty and has returned to cabinet with no difficulty.

Blunkett's decision to ignore the committee follows a series of decisions on appointments by Blair himself which undermine it. No doubt it will have been neutered completely by the time the PM himself becomes an ex-minister and is looking for work.

WHILE foreign secretary Jack Straw rushed to condemn Uzbekistan's army for shooting dead civilians in Andijan, no one bothered to suspend the British army's training programme for the very same Uzbek soldiers.

The ministry of defence told *Private Eye* that the UK-Uzbekistan military cooperation programme was under review following the shootings, but had not been suspended.

Under this programme Uzbek officers train at Sandhurst, the Royal College of Defence Studies in London and at the Joint Services Command and Staff College near Swindon. Less senior Uzbek officers are taught at British training camps in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The MoD says the training falls under "defence diplomacy".

Britain's diplomatic overtures to the not very diplomatic repressive regime of Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan began after 11 September when the US and UK decided to ignore human rights concerns in favour of making the country an ally (it has big oil reserves!) in the "war on terror".

The British embassy in Tashkent says the training aims to "dispel hostility, build and maintain trust and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution". But given the Uzbek army's crackdown and the civilian death toll, it seems the training hasn't been entirely successful.

The MoD told the *Eye* the programme was designed to "improve leadership skills and make the Uzbek officers more professional as a modernised army would be more democratic and accountable". But it also covers "the 'full spectrum of operations' [and] includes counter-insurgency, peace enforcement, peace support and humanitarian operations".

Number crunchings

50% ■ Proportion of cash owed by African countries which has been stolen by corrupt officials

40% ■ Proportion of global aid money World Bank gave to consultants last year

HIGH PRINCIPALS

LECTURERS at Liverpool John Moores University are demanding an independent inquiry into the dismissal of an academic who is an outspoken critic of the local transport body.

Transport science expert Professor Lewis Lesley was sacked in 2002 for "gross misconduct" after 25 years working at the university. There were allegations that he was "difficult to work with" but colleagues signed a petition saying this was nonsense.

A year later, rather than face a tribunal the university unsacked Prof Lesley and gave him voluntary severance which granted him an emeritus professorship and five-figure settlement.

Following a ballot of members last month, lecturers' union Natfhe is calling for the whole incident to be re-examined by an outside inquiry. It says there is disturbing evidence that vice-chancellor Professor Michael Brown's view of Prof Lesley was coloured by his open criticism of local transport projects.

Letters disclosed by Merseytravel, the transport consortium managed by local authorities, show that just before the dismissal the local authorities had complained to the university about letters Prof Lesley had written to local newspapers criticising their abandoning of a local tram project.

Prof Brown replied, saying he didn't want to "disturb the positive relationship" between the university and Merseytravel, both big players in various regional projects, and that Prof Lesley may wish to "consider his position" after being told to always make it clear that his views were not those of the university and that the professor would "not receive any support in any way from his employers" if sued by Merseytravel. So much for defending academic freedom.

Liverpool John Moores told the *Eye* it was unable to comment on the case due to a confidentiality clause in its agreement with Prof Lesley.

PS: Natfhe has other concerns about the university's attitude to staff. The lecturers' "common interest committee", which is supposed to bring senior managers together with staff to discuss employment issues, failed to meet for two years, until the union forced a meeting in March.

"Oh, by the way... how did the divorce settlement go?

PFI SPECIAL

Paddington bare

PUTTING what must be the final nail into the coffin of the Paddington "super hospital" plans, the board of the Royal Brompton and Harefield Trust has withdrawn its backing saying it was concerned about the project's "affordability gap".

The Paddington Health Campus (PHC) was already stymied by the fact that there was no land left to put it on, after the owner of the only remotely plausible site said it wouldn't play ball (*Eye* 1131). Meanwhile the estimated capital costs of bringing St Mary's Hospital, Harefield Hospital, the Royal Brompton Hospital and Imperial College's National Heart and Lung Institute together in one big PFI development had spiralled from an original estimate of £360m to just over £1bn.

Until now NHS bosses have clung to the scheme like limpets, racking up consultants' bills of at least £8m, not to mention the lawyers' bills. Back in January, however, the department of health's deputy director of finance, Peter Coates, wrote to Gareth Goodier, chief executive of the North-West London strategic health authority, saying he had "grave reservations about the deliverability and affordability of the campus project." He went on: "I am writing to formally request that you and the trusts carefully consider whether you believe progressing with the PHC remains a viable alternative, bearing in mind the low probability of a successful outcome in the near future."

What did Goodier do with that advice? He certainly didn't take it to heart. In February he reported to the health authority board that the PHC team was looking into yet another land deal "with considerable enthusiasm". And to ensure that the messages were thoroughly mixed, in the same month, despite his own department's "grave reservations", health minister Stephen Ladyman told the House of Commons: "This is a vision that the government fully supports. We see it as an excellent proposal not only for local health services but for the specialist services that will be provided to the wider NHS on the site."

Not so Great Western

SO MUCH for the PFI's sensible "green" credentials.

The new Great Western hospital in Wiltshire, which started out as a plan to renovate Swindon's central (and viable) St Margaret hospital for about £45m, turned into a £132m project to build a new hospital with fewer beds on greenfield land seven miles from the town centre.

Why this environmental short-sightedness? Because it's what the private sector consortium that built and now runs the new hospital wanted. The consortium is led by Carillion, whose chief executive (and now its chairman) was Sir Neville Simms, a leading member of the Tories' private finance panel for much of the 1990s.

Environment secretary Margaret Beckett has now set up a "sustainable procurement taskforce" to draw up an action plan to "avoid adverse environmental impacts". It might be expected to look at preventing such negative impacts as greenfield land destruction and increased need for car journeys – in other words, precisely the sort of impacts brought about by the Great Western hospital PFI.

So who better to chair the taskforce than, er, Sir Neville Simms? His colleagues on the new body are unlikely to do much to impede PFI either. They include: David Fison, chief executive of another industry giant, Skanska; Jiggy Lloyd, director of AWG (behind the Highlands school PFI deal that involves bulldozing playing fields – see last *Eye*); Tim Stone, head of PFI at consultants KPMG; and Paul Kelly, director of PFI catering firm, Compass. The department of health is represented on the group by its commercial director Ken Anderson – a former director of failed PFI company, Amey.

Bermuda short

MAPELEY, the Bermuda-based company that bought the country's tax offices four years ago under the STEPS PFI contract, has finally announced its long-rumoured flotation on the stock market. But will anybody want to buy shares in a company with such a lamentable record?

Only seven months after signing the STEPS deal Mapeley was on the brink of collapse, largely because it had under-bid on the contract, and went back to the government to ask for an extra £27m each year, which even on official figures would have made the deal significantly more expensive than the boring alternative of keeping the tax offices in public ownership.

Then last year, with the *Eye* already having revealed that the contract was costing the taxpayer £75m a year more than predicted, parliament's public accounts committee (PAC) heard that negotiations for yet more cash remained unresolved two years after they started.

The government insisted it would only cough up in return for more services (though there was no sign of what it was getting for the extra millions it was already paying), while Mapeley maintained that it signed the contract on duff information and should be compensated.

To make matters worse, since winning the STEPS deal the company has failed to win any more contracts despite several attempts. Perhaps realising its venture into the "outsourcing" market is doomed, Mapeley has now reinvented itself as a "property investment" group.

Although everything publicly known about the secretive company's business suggests it's a complete turkey, Mapeley now claims that last year it earned £73m before interest and tax (not likely to be much for a tax haven company). So how on earth did the boys from Bermuda turn their company into one that investors might want to buy shares in? Could it be anything to do with the claims for more money that HM Revenue and Customs chairman David Varney told parliament would be settled "hopefully in April"?

An HMRC spokesman admitted that the talks were still rumbling on, explaining ominously: "If we cannot resolve the issues we will have to engage in a process of dispute resolution and, if necessary, litigation. As is often the case with a contract of this size and complexity, signing was only the beginning of an on-going and challenging contract management process". Unsurprisingly for a confidential PFI deal, however, no detail was given of how much more taxpayers' cash is finding its way to Bermuda.

Amid the wrangling last year the NAO concluded that the STEPS deal would only work if HMRC and Mapeley "move towards a partnership approach". With HMRC seemingly ready to bring in m'learned friends and precious little sign of any "partnership", the bankers now trying to flog the tax haven-based tax office operator might have a job on their hands.

Warballs

● "After 9.11, I wanted to come up with a real red-blooded American movie. And I thought, a movie about the Dukes of Hazzard is exactly what I am talking about." – **Bill Gerber, producer of The Dukes of Hazzard, *Time* magazine.**

● "Burlesque is back. But is it a post-ironic, fashionable ritual that will pass as line-dancing did? Or is this some post-9.11 expression of you-only-live-once decadence? All these questions are ignored by the vapid Immodesty Blaize and Walter's Burlesque." – **Theatre review by Adam Scott, *Independent*.**

TV

Sugar Rush (Channel 4)

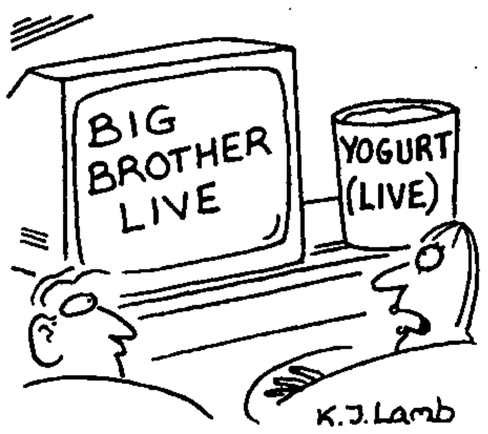
MANY veteran television producers still speak in pained tones in west London wine bars of their Julie Burchill Moment in the late 1970s or early 80s. Reading NME or later the Sunday Times, they came across a columnist who seemed to possess everything TV needed. Gobby and provocative with an ego that made Hughie Green look self-effacing, she was apparently happy to say almost anything to get attention. Here clearly was a TV series waiting to happen.

Through contacts they would secure a phone number and call to arrange the exploratory lunch at Julie's in Holland Park (no relation). When the squeaky little Minnie Mouse answered, they either said "is your mum in?" or assumed this helium answering technique was part of her wicked sense of humour. Eventually they were forced to accept that the intended focus of their ground-breaking, Bafta-winning show was, in that dreaded old BBC engineer abbreviation, NVR: Not Vocally Reliable.

Some – the self-defined mavericks from the arts department mainly – stubbornly persevered to the lunch where they discovered that, as well as not having the voice of a conventional telly presenter, Julie didn't have the body either. And so an apparently obvious career move became an impossible one. Ms Burchill's experience of the television would mainly be from the sofa-side, watching old friends and new enemies like Tony Parsons beaming out of her box.

Occasionally, Julie was used as a writer (a play about her dad and his dog) until, more recently, a new broader definition of what a TV host could be allowed her in front of the cameras for a documentary about Chavs on digital. But, perhaps sensibly, Big Julie is out of view for her latest telly venture: a 10-part C4 adaptation of her recent teenage lesbian novel, Sugar Rush.

In fact, she hasn't even written this – Katie Baxendale has adapted it from the book – although inevitably it's Julie doing all the publicity. The fourth channel, which gets it biggest audiences of the year with Big Brother, has scheduled this im-



"I can't decide which is more interesting"

mediately after the Tuesday edition of BB6 in the hope of holding on to viewers who enjoy the tension of wondering if two girls are going to get it on together.

The basic problem with Burchill writing a teenage lesbian novel is that it's now a very long time since she was either. At least, though, she's much more familiar with Brighton, her long-time home, and both novel and TV adaptation are sensibly set there.

The three main ingredients of Burchill's writing have always been shock tactics, wordplay and wild inconsistency and all are in abundance here. There's a masturbating, Mail-bating opening scene in which the 15-year-old heroine Kim is discovered with her electric toothbrush throbbing between her legs under the duvet. Having given puritans a good seeing-to with this scene, the show starts madly doubling its entendres. Virtually every line of dialogue consists of a character either being misunderstood or failing to realise the other meaning of what they are saying.

In category one, Sugar, the girl Kim secretly fancies, will suddenly say: "I know what you need." Kim does a double-take which, in a teen magazine, would be topped by a speech-bubble containing the words "a good shagging from you." But, inevitably, Sugar answers "a drink" and pours one for Kim.

In category two, Kim's vague liberal dad has failed to spot that his wife is being knobbed by the decorator although, hilariously, he keeps accidentally putting his finger on it, ooh er missus. He expresses admiration that the handyman's work is "very straight" and his wallpaper is "well hung."

Faithful to Burchill's wordplay, the script is also true to her amazing ability at contradiction. While Kim tries to persuade Sugar to swing both ways, the tone of the show is veering in three directions. The Carry On vulgarity of the dialogue will suddenly give way to sub-Adrian Mole-ish stuff about family life (a kid brother who wears a space helmet and claims to come from another planet) before everyone remembers that they are dealing with sensitive issues of adolescent sexuality and so there had better be a bit of moral context: "Why is everyone so fucked up about sex?" shouts Kim on the voice-over after discovering that Sugar doesn't really enjoy it with all the lads she shags.

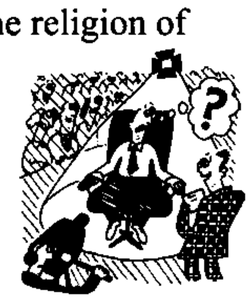
Male Big Brother viewers attracted by the come-on publicity for this drama are warned that, by the end of episode two, there has been no serious girl-on-girl action at all. Viewers tuning in for the drama may conclude that, as well as lacking the voice and looks for television, Ms Burchill doesn't really have the books.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What is the religion of Japan: shinto or brillo?



Contestant: Brillo.

AR: What black-and-white bird should you salute if you see it on its own?

Contestant: Penguin.

Just Jones, BBC Radio Ulster

George Jones: What type of spaniel is named after royalty?

Contestant: Cocker.

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Wright: What is the name of the mountain that overlooks Rio de Janeiro?

Contestant: Er, can I have a clue?

Wright: It's a cute name.

Contestant: Claire?

MEDIA NEWS

ARRIVING in the *Big Brother* house for the sixth series of the reality show, black gay Tory Derek Laud told viewers he had "penned speeches for the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine while working in the House of Commons", that his favourite book was Nelson Mandela's autobiography, and that he was proud to be known to friends by the nickname "Golly".

Should he manage to avoid eviction and stay in the house for the show's full 13-week run, perhaps he will manage to clarify some of these points to his housemates: despite writing letters on Commons notepaper and giving the palace of Westminster as his official address in Debretts during the 1990s, he actually held no parliamentary position – instead he was busy running a lobbying company, Ludgate Laud, which is alleged to have attempted to fix honours for its clients in return for cash donations to the Conservative party.

Another firm for which Laud worked in the 1980s, Strategy Network International, did PR work for several companies connected to the apartheid regime in South Africa which graciously allowed Mandela so much time to research his book.

The name "Golly" was bestowed upon him by chums in the far-right Monday Club, which supported an end to immigration and the repatriation of black people. Laud, who is Jamaican, was the club's secretary. His peculiar accent was attributed by some charming Tory MPs to his "having eaten a very posh missionary".

"JONATHAN Ross and Graham Norton will be spearheading the BBC line-up of stars at Live 8," gushes a BBC press release, promising that as "the host broadcaster" the Beeb will bring "all the action, music and backstage news live to the UK and around the world".

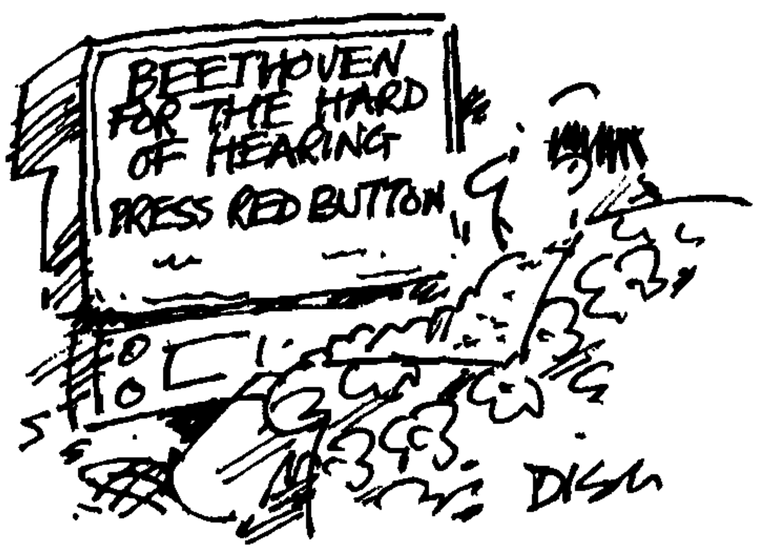
But just a minute! Won't coverage of the event, designed specifically "to raise awareness of the Make Poverty History campaign", breach the rules drawn up by the BBC's own editorial policy unit? These rules state clearly that "the BBC cannot host activity campaigning specifically for Make Poverty History however widespread support for its aims may appear to be".

Happily a solution is at hand. Culture secretary Tessa Jowell, who also runs the BBC these days, has reassured suits at the corporation that "the UK government has backed the project" and that "Live 8 will "set the scene" for the G8 summit" – an event so important to Tony that the usual rules governing the BBC's alleged independence from this government look set to be breached yet again.

AS THE BBC bends over backwards to comply with every instruction issued by the DCMS, it appears that the BBC1 Holiday programme is about to be sacrificed.

Offering "top tips for the happiest trips" it is rightly considered to be "lifestyle" pap and will thus be shelved in the name of charter renewal. But this creates a problem for the show's absurdly ambitious presenter, Ginny Buckley, former *Screws* motoring editor and "very experienced corporate host and live events facilitator", according to her agent.

She does not wish to be associated with a show in its death throes. So instead Laurence Llewellyn Bowen, whose own lifestyle programmes have already been canned by the Beeb, will make a spirited but brief return.



TONY BENN made a welcome appearance on the picket line on the day of the BBC strike, expressing solidarity with those who had walked out and regaling them with tales of his own salary when he joined the corporation in 1949.

"I was paid £9 a week as a producer… I lived the life of Riley on nine quid a week."
Benn did not, however, update them on his more recent broadcasting arrangements. When Benn appears as a newspaper reviewer on Sky News, he is paid £100 – 25 percent more than the going rate for the slot.

JOHN HUMPHRYS has been grumbling about the vast salaries paid to TV newsreaders for simply reading an autocue. "It isn't work, whatever anybody says. You get paid a lot of money and it requires no brain."

How unlike John Humphrys, one of the star performers on the books of the Speakers For Business agency. In return for a five-figure fee, companies can hear the great man recite one of his well-worn speeches on pet topics such as "politics" or "the food industry".

For an even bigger fee, you can book him for a corporate video in which he'll lob softball questions to your chairman or chief executive. It may not require much brain-work but, *pro rata*, it's a lot better paid than newsreading.

GOING LIVE

NO GREAT insight when the BBC Six O'Clock News went live to Nick Higham for the latest on the BBC's own strike and its continuing talks at ACAS.

"Any word on how the talks are going?" asked "Gorgeous" George Alagiah.

"Nothing at all, but I believe they had sandwiches for lunch," came the reply.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"How could an alien assassinate the Prime Minister and then get elected mayor of Cardiff within six months? The press is very good at knowing who's who. Private Eye, for one, would have made a big fuss about it – they cover local council scandals."

– Post from "Outpost Gallifrey", Doctor Who discussion internet discussion forum.

DISGUSTED by the appearance of various high-profile presenters on his radio on the day of the BBC strike, an *Eye* reader and NUJ member emailed Radio One breakfast show host Chris Moyles with author Jack London's famous definition of a scab.

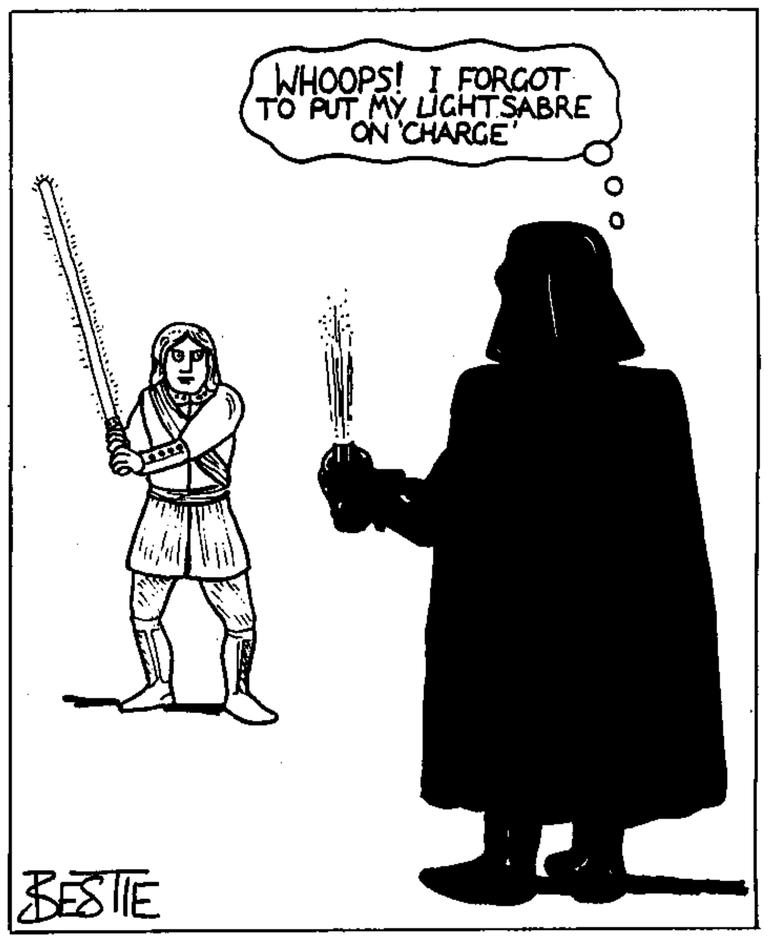
"After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful stuff left with which he made a scab. A scab is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a waterlogged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts he carries a tumour of rotten principles…"

Soon afterwards, he received the following reply from the BBC's "investigation service". "We have received an offensive hate email from your email address. Possibly it is not from you yourself but from a child in the family? May I ask you to refrain from either sending such material or allowing others to use your email account for what is, after all, a criminal offence?"

I-SKY

"What price a sporting legend?… The memorabilia market is one test of legendary status among sporting personalities: the bigger the legend, the more somebody, somewhere is prepared to pay for an autograph, a signed ball, or some other trinket. But ultimately, one man's legend – take Diego Maradona – is another man's cheat. Sport has always been about opinions, and over the next eight weeks on Sky One, Sir David Frost and Desmond Lynam will present The World's Greatest Sporting Legend…"

– 34 page pull-out free with Sunday Times *(prop: R. Murdoch) advertising a new series on Sky One (prop: R. Murdoch).*



DAFT VADER

AD NAUSEAM

CONGRATULATIONS to KFC, whose call-centre staff eating with their mouths full has just beaten a spot for Mr Kipling (a parody of the nativity) and an ad for Wrigley's chewing gum (where a dog crawled out of a man's mouth) to become the most complained about ad ever.

Unlike those two, however, KFC escaped censure from the ASA which agreed with the advertiser that the ad was funny, and therefore beyond reproach – 1,671 complainants, more than Kipling and Wrigley's put together, need to get a life, says the ASA.

The *Eye*'s own complaint has nothing to do with the table manners debate, but with the logistics of filling your mouth with a KFC burger. In April the ASA *did* rap KFC for an ad for the mini-fillet chicken burger because the on-screen product was much larger than the real thing. From this we can only conclude that the new ad must be misleading because how would call centre staff fill their mouths with one of KFC's tiny products?

MORE parochialism from the self-styled "World's Local Bank", HSBC (*Eye* 1115). A reader wishing to buy a property in Bulgaria needed to set up a Bulgarian bank account, and so his thoughts naturally turned to HSBC's pan-global campaign.

Unfortunately, the bank's Tottenham Court Road Branch said they couldn't help because the world's local bank had no connections in Bulgaria. Further inquiries proved that the bank clerk didn't actually know where Bulgaria was, let alone if HSBC has a branch there.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

THE ON-OFF KATE MOSS/PETE DOHERTY SAGA CONTINUES.....
KATE....I NEED TO KNOW... PLEASE TELL ME!!!
BEG!
...ARE WE GONNA BE IN THE PAPERS TODAY OR AREN'T WE?!!!
I DON'T KNOW, PETE.... I'M ALL SCREWED UP.... DON'T PRESSURISE ME!!!
SOB!

DOING THE ROUNDS

THE privatisation of the NHS continues with the leak that 10 percent of the primary care trust (PCT) budget for GPs will be set aside for "innovative private solutions" to the patchy provision of primary care.

The money will doled out under LIFT (local improvement finance trust), which is the GP equivalent of the PFI scheme. At present, LIFT only allows private companies to build health centres; but in future they can compete with NHS GPs for a slice of the healthcare market. This private money is to be ring-fenced, which is bad news for GPs in PCTs which are heavily in debt.

Kensington and Chelsea PCT is already £14.5m in the red, and the future for practices hoping for premises improvements under LIFT is looking bleak.

So will private practice be able to plug the holes in primary care? As with dentistry, there are many (largely poor) areas of the country that are seriously under-manned. Historically, doctors in these areas work as hard (or harder) than their colleagues but earn much less than those in the leafy suburbs unless they are extremely well managed. Private companies will be offered unfair incentives to enter the market and will employ doctors, thus freeing them of management duties. However, how much these salaried doctors will be forced to abandon clinical freedom and chase the money remains to be seen.

The parlous state of general practice is partly of the government's making. The latest (December 2004) figures show a reduction in GP registrars (ie trainees) of 7 percent over three months, largely thanks to cutbacks in Deanery budgets and the better pay of hospital trainees. Medical training is expensive and time consuming, with no quick political gain. Far easier to buy in private companies employing overseas doctors.

"New" labour has also precipitated a crisis in out-of-hours care. The model of replacing a GP-run system with nurse-triage has not proved popular with patients. Typically, you phone NHS Direct (a nurse triage system) to be referred to your local on-call service (another nurse-triage system). This absurdly convoluted system undoubtedly puts off the time-wasters, but many of those who need to see a doctor can't get near one in less than two hours and end up dialling 999.

GPs, who are working increasingly hard to hit targets during the day, are no longer obliged to do night work and many won't touch it for the pay rates on offer. The NorMed co-op in Northampton has demanded a 20 percent funding increase to pay for its manpower crisis, and in Cardiff, Healthcare 24 has employed cheaper staff-grade hospital doctors to cover the shifts. In North Yorkshire, the GP co-op NYED has gone bust and Christine Lenihan, the chief executive of NHS 24, the Scottish equivalent of NHS Direct, has resigned because the nurse triage system is in chaos.

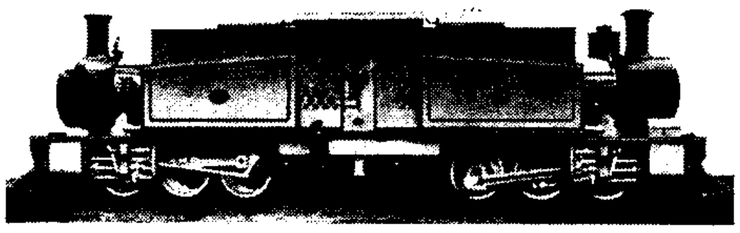
"New" labour's only solution seems to be to throw money at private companies and hope they can bail it out. The theory is that as long as these services are free at the point of access, they're all part of the NHS; but it seems unlikely this ethos will hold out. Twenty-five NHS GPs in Canterbury are so appalled at the out-of-hours service that they've grouped together to form ChaucerDoc, which will charge patients £55 to see a GP, rather than listen to a nurse. As founder Dr Peter Biggs put it: "Within two years, it'll be virtually impossible to see a GP out of hours (on the NHS). We're providing convenience at a very reasonable price." As Alan "Family Man" Milburn once said: "The NHS is not for sale" Yeah, right.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

OI, NURSE - I'VE BEEN SITTING HERE FOR TWO HOURS. WHEN AM I GOING TO SEE A DOCTOR?
WELL, WE GUARANTEE TO SEE EVERYONE WITHIN FOUR HOURS, SO...
ONE HOUR 59 MINUTES



SIGNAL FAILURES

Skeg-mess

THE legacy of Railtrack's incompetence may help "new" Labour's third-term drive to downgrade secondary railways and save a few quid.

British Rail used to provide long trains of spare carriages and locos between the east Midlands and Skegness to shift thousands of summer holidaymakers. After privatisation Railtrack demanded premium track fees (*Eye* 868) for these loco-hauled trains, which are heavier than sprinter trains. In 1997 *Eye* 933 reported how Central Trains had provided just one or two sprinter carriages when hundreds of people wanted to go to Skegness.

Central belatedly changed its mind and organised Saturday loco-hauled trains to Skegness for this summer. But after a trial run in March, Network Rail decided it had better things to do than serve the public (who underwrite its multi-billion-pound borrowing).

Initially it said there wasn't enough platform capacity at Nottingham for the loco-hauled train and the Skegness line couldn't accommodate that train alongside usual services. Then on 13 May Network Rail slapped a three-month ban on loco-hauled trains on the Skegness line: but now the problem was that the trial train had broken the track. Conveniently that ban, introduced two months after the trial run, will continue until almost the end of the summer holiday season.

The next step is for NR to cook up its house speciality: an estimate for improving the track that's so inflated it's way out of proportion to the benefit involved. Skegness could then be confined permanently to sprinter-type trains. Midlanders fed up with overcrowded holiday trains would be even more inclined towards budget flights abroad – not good news for the environment or Lincolnshire's economy.

Why can't the Skegness track take the weight of medium-size locos? Because their absence was exploited by Railtrack and then NR to save cash, by maintaining the track for nothing heavier than sprinters.

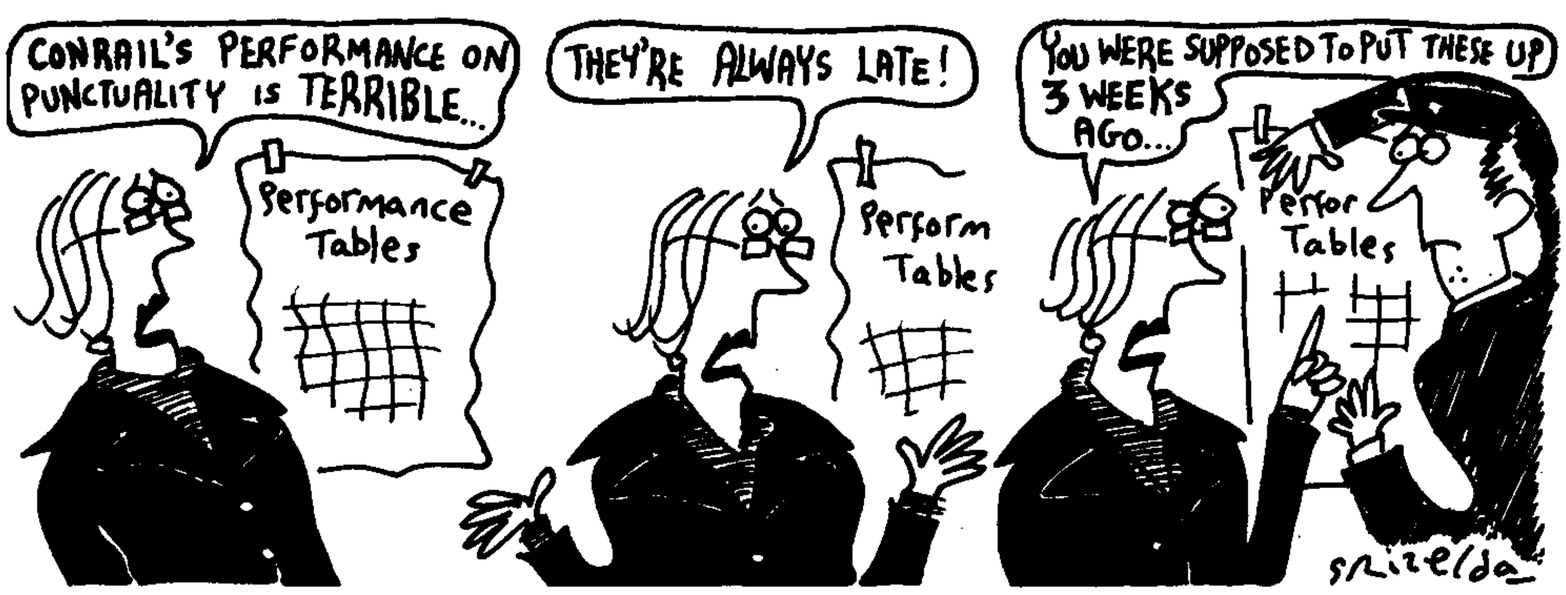
When Railtrack was formed it was funded to maintain all routes to preserve the same capabilities as under BR. Where that hasn't happened and NR's customers (train operators) are thwarted as a result, NR, as Railtrack's successor, should put things right quickly.

NR though is trying to wriggle out of responsibilities elsewhere too. Several miles of track on the mothballed line to Partington, near Manchester, were stolen on Railtrack's watch but Railtrack and NR have been paid to maintain the line.

Now that rail freight company EWS wants to run trains on the route, NR says EWS must pay to replace the stolen track. Given that Railtrack neglected even the east-coast and Great Western mainlines, NR must have plenty of scope for similar tactics on lesser-used routes around Britain.

The rail regulators and government could insist the neglect is put right, but NR's enormous repair estimates could be just the ticket. "New" Labour is determined not to increase the rail budget any further and the money has to be found somewhere for those rising rail-company profits and directors' bonuses.

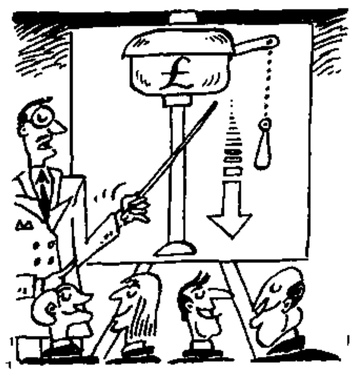
'Dr B. Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

WASTE DISPOSAL

MOST people would agree that hauling Paul Dimoldenberg, Westminster council's Labour group leader, in front of the adjudication panel of the Standards Board for England (SBE) in an attempt to have him barred from public office (see *Eyes passim*) was a terrific waste of public money. But how much exactly?



The SBE reckons the case cost it about £65,000. With a two-year "investigation" and the hiring of three QCs, that seems conservative. Back in January, Sir Alistair Graham, chairman of the committee on standards in public life, noted "the large number of minor, vexatious and politically motivated complaints that have created a significant backlog of national investigations, leaving many councillors with allegations hanging over their heads for long periods of time". Eliminating many of these, he said, would enable the standards board to make "significant savings" in its £9m a year budget. That's a lesson learned, then. *(See Letters, 13-14)*

KNIFE WORK

MEANWHILE the Standards Board of England (SBE) has decided to take no action against three councillors who covered up a colleague's criminal conviction for violence.

Rochdale Labour councillors Robin Parker, Colin Lambert and Peter Roberts all knew that Gholam Murtaza had served a jail sentence for assaulting two female detectives with a kitchen knife (*Eyes* 1097 and 1100), and was therefore not qualified to stand as a councillor in the May 2003 local elections. Yet they let his selection go ahead and he was elected.

Murtaza did not resign for six months after being exposed in the local press because Labour was anxious to hang on to its one-seat majority on the council. Now one of the SBE's "ethical standards officers" has concluded that Murtaza "brought his office into disrepute" and that the other three broke the councillors' code of conduct by failing to report him. Yet, says the SBE, no public interest would be served by pursuing the matter further.

Roberts has retired; Parker and Murtaza are no longer councillors, but there is nothing to stop them standing again; Lambert is Rochdale's education portfolio holder and parliamentary secretary for Heywood and Middleton MP Jim Dobbin. The only losers in the affair are Rochdale's three independent lay members on the council's standards committee who have resigned in disgust.

UNMADE BEDS

YET ANOTHER council, Bedfordshire, is regretting its contract to outsource services to Hyder Business Services (formerly Welsh Water).

The Centre for Public Services (CPS) has urged Bedfordshire county council to terminate its £267m, 12-year contract with the firm, entered into in June 2001, before HBS does any more damage.

In 2001 550 council staff transferred to HBS, with the aim of improving performance in areas such as information technology, human resources and school support services. Four years on HBS has failed abysmally to keep its side of the "partnership".

Promised corporate improvements have failed to materialise and performance is down on four key "best value" indicators. While only 52 percent of residents were happy with Bedfordshire's services before HBS took over in 2001, today that has fallen to 35 percent.

As in Milton Keynes (*Eye* 1131), the council now manages to pay fewer bills on time while, bizarrely, overpaying others. In April the council admitted that HBS had given away £130,000 in incorrect payments to 15 separate people within one week, all apparently as a result of an accounting error.

Last September, one resident who suffers from multiple sclerosis and receives payments from the council for his carers and expenses such as council tax, received a cheque courtesy of HBS for £4,590.41, which he was told was a payment for his own use. Having spent some of the money he was then told it was a mistake and that he should pay it back. Eight months later, in April this year, the same man received another payment out-of-the-blue, this time for £19,045. A week later council officers knocked on his door and demanded the money back.

● ALTHOUGH Doncaster's unpopular mayor, Martin Winter, managed an apparently comfortable majority of 8,434 over his closest rival on 5 May, the six anti-Winter candidates together polled a total of 78,935 votes against the mayor's 45,742. Most impressive figure of all, however, was the number of spoiled ballots. An outbreak of mass illiteracy... or 7,569 voters crying "F* the lot of you" in unison?**

BLACK OUT

FACED with allegations of widespread racism at Southwark council, the minority Lib-Dem administration last year commissioned a report by Lord (Herman) Ouseley, the former head of the Commission for Racial Equality (*Eyes passim*).

Alas it has not acted upon Ouseley's critical findings, and has now received a "final" written warning from the CRE that unless it proves by 25 June that it is acting to eliminate unlawful discrimination and is promoting race equality, it will face a full-scale investigation.

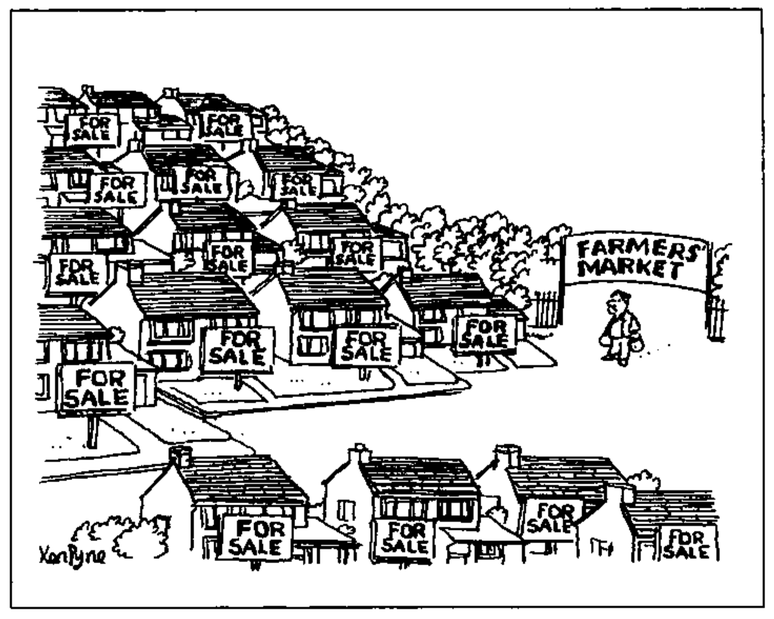
Lib Dem council leader Nick Stanton and chief executive Bob Coomber must also show what they are doing to implement Ouseley's recommendations. This may be a problem, given that a "cross-party" working group met for just 20 minutes in its first eight weeks.

Three months on, Ouseley still awaits a Q&A session with councillors. The first four drafts of his main report were rejected by Stanton and Coomber, while his annex on victims whose "lives have been destroyed by Southwark council" is on the council website. But as all the bits that criticise the council are blacked out, there's not a lot to read.

SLOGAN WATCH

● **"Delivering Civic Renewal through leadership, excellence, partnership, innovation and service"** – *Westminster city council.*

● **"Wirral has heard the cry of the Earth"** – *Wirral metropolitan borough council.*



EDUCASHUN NEWZ

NOWHERE has the department for education's vision of a city academy "drawing on the expertise of its sponsors to help develop its own distinctive ethos and mission" been more real than at Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough.

The £18m academy has been declared by Ofsted inspectors to be badly failing its pupils; it faces strikes from staff over job cuts and new contracts; and it has run up debts of £1.5m despite receiving £16m of public money under the government's flagship education policy.

Such a record reads all too much like that of the academy's sponsor, pisspoor PFI firm Amey.

As recounted in Paul Foot's special *PFEye* report last year (*Eye* 1102), Amey lost hundreds of millions of pounds on duff PFI deals, partly when its wildly optimistic accounting for around £70m of PFI bidding costs was exposed shortly *before* it sponsored UCA. After yet more losses and the resignation of two finance directors and the chief executive, the company was eventually snaffled up by a Spanish firm, Ferrovial, keen to get its hands on Amey's stake in London Underground concession company, Tubelines.

Alas, it appears the school's approach to education owes much to its sponsor's modish but useless business strategy. The DfES website explains that: "Unity City Academy has devised a new language to describe what is a radically new arrangement for learning. There are no traditional subject groupings, the learning is organised conceptually and there is strong encouragement on students to adopt responsibility for their own learning. Teachers incorporate different learning styles (Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic) into topics and learning sessions."

Back in September 2002 when he opened the school, David Miliband, then a junior education minister, promised that "UCA will give the children of Middlesbrough the inspiration and education they so richly deserve". Had he checked out its sponsor more thoroughly, he might have foreseen something closer to the results found by the inspectors.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

SORRY, POPPY, BUT OUR TRIP TO THE TATE WITH LOTTE WAS A COMPLETE DISASTER...
CRYING, TANTRUMS, HISSY FIT...
I'M SO SORRY TO HEAR THAT
YES, QUIN MADE A COMPLETE SCENE IN THE SHOP
I WANT A DAMIAN HIRST PENCIL CASE AND I WANT ONE NOW!!!

NOOKS and CORNERS

FOR SOME years now, rumblings have emanated from the government that Britain's diplomatic representation abroad is too expensive and our embassies are often an extravagance.

More to the point, perhaps, all those grand palaces built by the likes of Lord Curzon to represent the majesty of the empire give quite the wrong image. Much better, surely, to have an exciting new building resembling a Tesco supermarket, perhaps designed by an award-winning knighted architect, to convey what a go-ahead place Blairite Britain is. Forward not back!

Such thinking may explain the foreign and commonwealth office's (FCO) disgraceful behaviour over St Helena's Chapel in Istanbul, in the grounds of the British consulate. There has been an Anglican chapel on this site in Pera since the 17th century. The present building, which dates from 1882, was designed by W.H. Lynn of Belfast, who was commissioned by Lord Dufferin, who was then British ambassador to the Sublime Porte.

This chapel used to have its own entrance from the street but this has long been closed and it is now reached from the gardens of the consulate, formerly the embassy (when Constantinople was the capital of the Ottoman empire) – a handsome *palazzo* built in the 1840s from sketches by Sir Charles Barry.

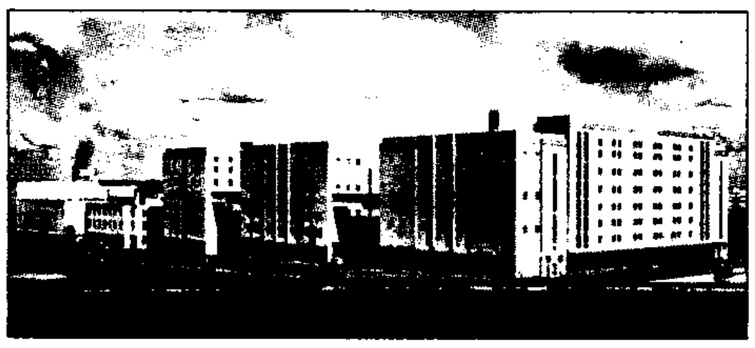
Both the consulate and chapel were damaged by the Al-Qa'eda bomb that killed the consul-general and many others in 2003. The consulate has since been repaired and made more secure, at great expense, but not St Helena's Chapel. The congregation has been actively discouraged by the consulate from using or even entering the building. Worse, in 2004 the consulate, without informing the church council responsible for St Helena's, pursued negotiations to lease it to the developer of an adjacent new hotel, possibly for use as a nightclub.

Informal verbal permission was given to the developer to use the churchyard, which has now been wrecked – trees cut down and two gate lodges demolished. There is now a proposal to build an entertainment bar right behind the east window of the chapel. Well might the chaplain complain to the current consul-general, Miss Barbara Hay, CMG, MBE, that such plans are ignoble, flout local custom and law on licensed premises and sacred places as well as being hurtful to the church council.

There is an active Anglican community in Istanbul based around three churches. One is St Helena's; another is the Crimean Memorial Church, a distinguished building by G.E. Street, architect of the Law Courts in London, which had been shamefully left derelict until 1993 when it was reconsecrated and revived. Surely St Helena's ought also to be brought back into use if only to show that we will not be intimidated by terrorism?

But perhaps such positive activities give a misleading impression of modern Britain. As is well known, Turkey would like to join the European Union despite being an Islamic country, so perhaps the foreign office is merely trying to help by demonstrating what a modern secular state such as Britain is really like: one in which history and tradition mean nothing and in which old churches are cheerfully abandoned when money can be made.

AND here's another scandal. In* Eye *1080 I described the attempt to secure a certificate of immunity from listing for the Guinness Brewery at Park Royal in north-west London. Designed by the great Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, working with the consulting engineers Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners, the brick-faced blocks erected in 1933-35 are magnificent and well worthy of listing – as English Heritage correctly concluded.



But Arthur Guinness & Co argued that listing would impede its operations and might lead to the closure of the brewery, resulting in job losses. This blackmail worked: the department for culture, media 'n' sport granted a certificate in 2003.

It now emerges that Guinness is closing the Park Royal brewery next month. The large site is now owned by a company called Diageo, which owns Guinness. Planning permission was granted for a business park in 1999, and a mediocre office block has already been built which partly blocks the splendid view of the redundant 1930s buildings from the A40. Diageo now plans to demolish them before the certificate of immunity expires in 2008. This may be correct in law, but surely wrong in principle. The government granted the immunity ostensibly to preserve brewing by Guinness at Park Royal, not to assist a tawdry asset-stripping development exercise.

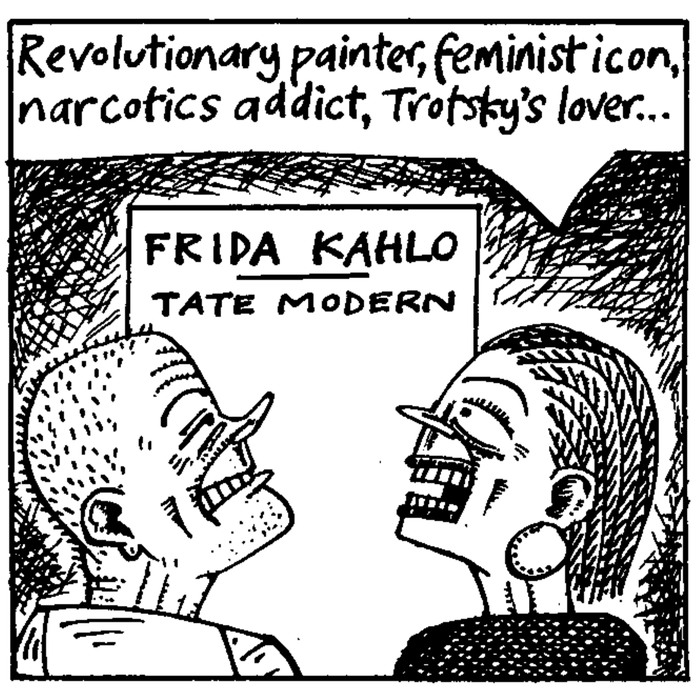
Besides, this government is meant to be committed to "sustainability" and the Scott buildings, clad in superb brickwork, represent, if nothing else, a huge amount of "embodied energy".

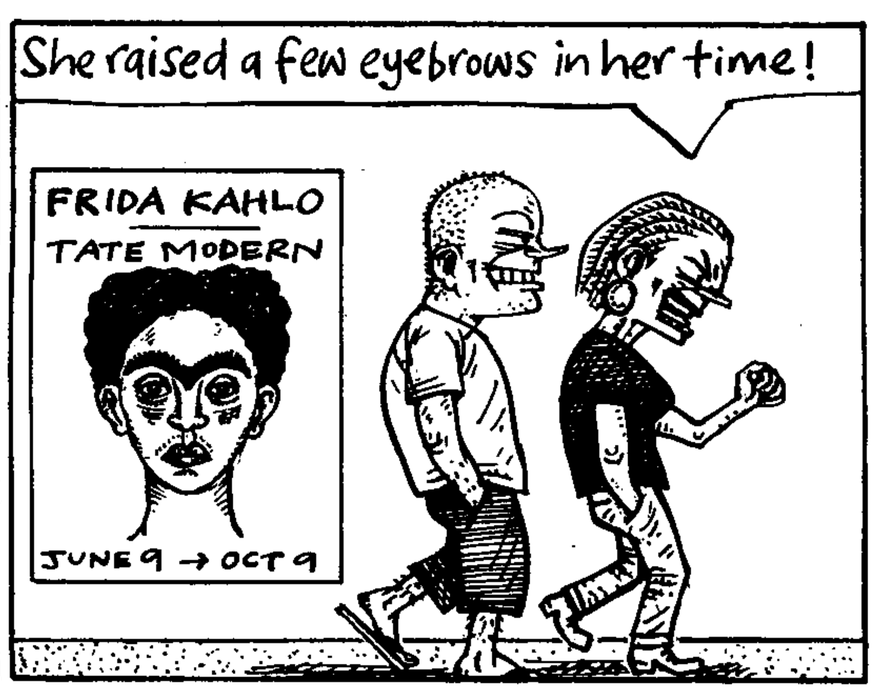
Regardless of their (great) architectural merit, to destroy such structures without any attempt to see if they are capable of reuse is irresponsible and anti-social. That certificate of immunity should never have been granted.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH





I-SPY

Central London

Submitted by N. Martin.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

Down on the Farm

LARGELY ignored by the media, 16 May saw the launch of the most bizarre innovation in British and European farming for more than half a century.

Heading at last for history's dustbin is the vilified system whereby taxpayers must shell out a staggering £34bn a year to the EU's farmers to produce food. Instead, under the new "single farm payment" scheme, taxpayers will now pay farmers £34bn a year to do nothing, apart from owning their land and keeping it tidy.

Almost alone in marking this event was the *Daily Telegraph*, with a long piece by Adam Nicolson hailing "the biggest bung in the history of the universe". His point was understandable. It is astonishing that farmers should be singled out from all other groups in society to receive that £34bn "bung" for not producing anything. But what Nicolson didn't realise was that he was making precisely the point the clever technocrats who designed this new system wanted him to make.

The real reason in 2003 the EU decided to introduce its new "single farm payment" was that Brussels was under horrendous pressure to cut back drastically on its farm subsidy bill. The need to subsidise all those east European farmers who were about to enter the EU would break the bank. The WTO was again complaining bitterly at how the EU was dumping huge quantities of subsidised food on the world market, destroying the live-lihoods of millions of poor farmers in the third world.

The system whereby the EU paid farmers to over-produce mountains of surplus food had long been a scandal. More than one previous attempt had been made to phase out production subsidies without much success. But simply to stop them would have provoked such political uproar it was unthinkable. What was needed was a wholly new approach. And here came the brilliant idea which was to lead to the new SFP scheme.

Why not find an entirely different, more fashionable justification for subsidising farmers? Instead of paying them to grow food, pay them instead for keeping the countryside neat and tidy, with a few animals dotted about, so that tourists and city dwellers would find it looking just like their picture postcard image of what the countryside should be.

What was really ingenious was that, once people saw that farmers were no longer being paid to grow food, it would not be long before clever journalists like Mr Nicolson were writing angry articles asking why farmers alone in the community should be paid to do nothing. Such outrage would build up that eventually it would seem entirely reasonable to end such a ridiculous practice, saving billions of euros for Brussels to spend on other things.

Indeed, following his own logic, this was exactly where Nicolson ended up, calling for the abolition of subsidies and asking for farmers to sell their product on the free market like everyone else. What he overlooks, however, is that outside the little world of the EU are a whole lot of farmers in places like New Zealand, Argentina and Canada who, thanks to efficiencies of scale, could soon undercut the farmers of Europe and do to them what they have been doing for so long to the farmers of the third world.

Remove subsidies altogether and we would soon have very few farmers and not much countryside either. Unless looking out at vistas of derelict, weed-strewn fields counts as the countryside we all wish to preserve.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Slipping Standards?

Sir,

Re. Porter House Blues, Eye 1133.

Why did the Standards Board of England need two highly-paid barristers – Antony White QC and Heather Rogers – to prosecute their case against me? Were they so unsure of their case that one barrister was not enough?

This case lasted almost two years and resulted in no action being taken against me. The adjudication panel threw out the ridiculous charge that I had "brought the council into disrepute" and vindicated my decision to join forces with the BBC to blow the whistle on Westminster city council's "go slow" on the collection of the £42m surcharge owed by Shirley Porter for the "Homes for Votes" scandal.

How much did this latest Standards Board fiasco cost the taxpayers? Will there be an inquiry? I have yet to meet anybody – other than a few Westminster Conservatives – who can believe that the case was brought against me in the first place. Yet I have had to suffer almost two years of hell and am many thousands of pounds out of pocket.

And what of the Westminster chief executive and the council's monitoring officer? Are they going to take any responsibility for what must rank as one of the most spectacular errors of judgment of recent times?

My view is that the Standards Board needs root and branch reform. Their ethical standards officers and investigators see councillors as the problem, people to be dealt with. They don't like or understand councillors (probably because very few of them come from a local government background). They see councillors as people whom they can "throw the book at". All very enjoyable for them, I'm sure. But what has that got to do with democracy, never mind "confidence in democracy"?

Yours faithfully,
CLLR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG,

Westminster City Council, London SW1.

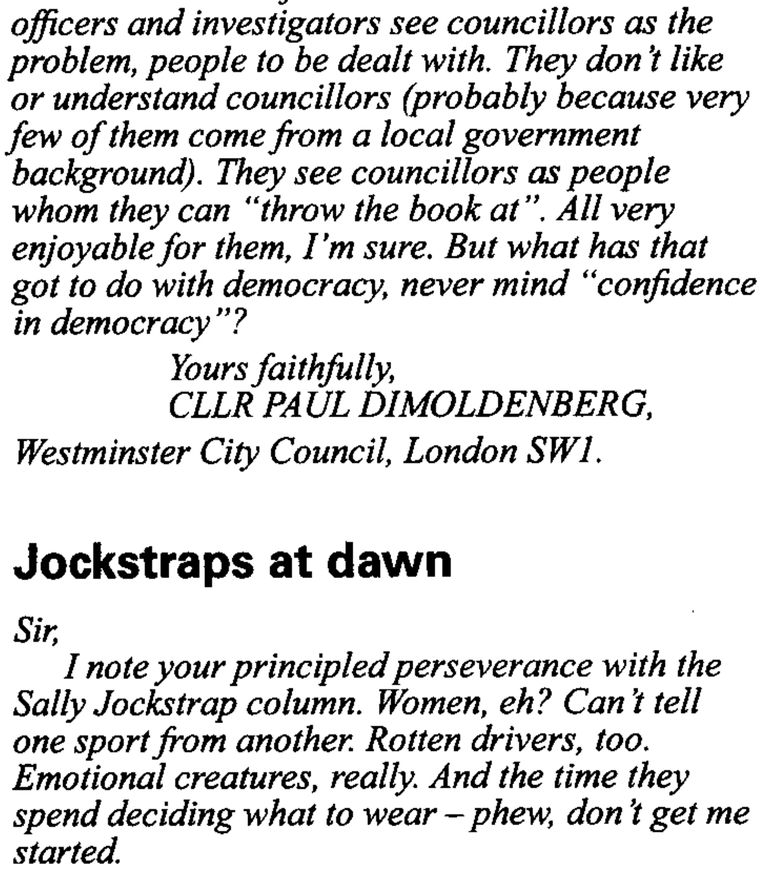
Jockstraps at dawn

Sir,

I note your principled perseverance with the Sally Jockstrap column. Women, eh? Can't tell one sport from another. Rotten drivers, too. Emotional creatures, really. And the time they spend deciding what to wear – phew, don't get me started.

Yours in stitches,
BASIL RANSOME-DAVIES,

Lancaster.



Blowing his Hornby

Sir,

Re. Literary Review, 1133. I don't think that article was very fair to Hornby at all. Tim Lott, not interested. He's a bore. But the Hornby book – it's very good.

Your reviewer copied somebody from the "Late Review" saying that all the voices were Hornby's voices. Well, it is him who's writing the book! And it isn't true either – I could imagine the Maureen character quite well, thought her dialogue was certainly not that of a bloke Arsenal supporter – Hornby gets important things across don't you think? I was actually very moved by some of the passages in the book – the guy is trying to be inclusive. So why this acidic approach to the book? I think that the majority of people who buy that book are going to enjoy it very much, and be moved by it. I think they'll probably recognise some of the situations and emotions that go on in the narrative too – Christ, it might even help some people.

Bad form. Your reviewer should take a second look.

Rant over.

SEAN EDWARDS,

Via email.

Sharp comment falls flat

Sir,

After being assigned as his social worker, Michael Camp described the so-called "Piano Man", found in Sheppey, as "Very highly strung".

GEOFF WRIGHT,

Doncaster.

Lookalike

Euan

Piano Man

Sir,

Given the startling resemblance between Euan Blair and the so-called Piano Man, one of whom was found wandering aimlessly around Leicester Square, the other on the south coast, could they by any chance be related and both be the children of a man who will also shortly be found wandering around rather aimlessly?

ENA B. BROWN,

London W1.

Doesn't ad up

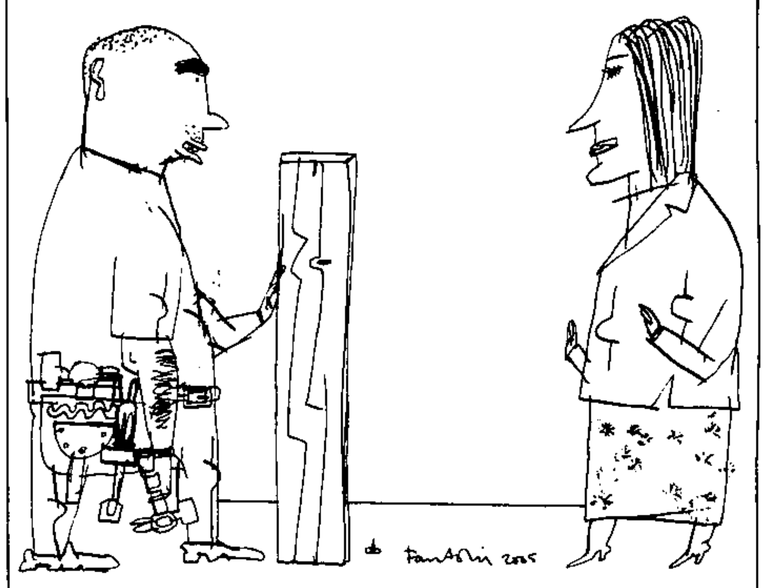
Sir,

Although it is debatable whether adverts for the Sony PlayStation "communicate... the new experience and excitement of computer entertainment" (How Advertising Works, Eye 1133), the ASA online adjudication archive does communicate the fact that the advert banned for featuring the tagline "What's it feel like to drill the head of the punk who stole your family from you?" belonged to multi-format game publisher THQ and not Sony themselves. Punk-head-drilling adventure The Punisher is actually available for a variety of videogame systems, including the Microsoft Xbox; something that should have been apparent seeing as the offensive ad in question appeared in Official Xbox Magazine.

Regards,
MATTHEW BROUGH,

Glasgow.

Scenes You Seldom See



"A cup of tea? Thanks. I'd like a herbal infusion, preferably camomile and absolutely no sugar"

Popular in St Pancras

Sir,

As a regular user of the British Library over many years, I am not joining in the whingeing about the increased use of the St Pancras reading rooms which the Eye reflects. The fact that a public resource is actually being used, and a library at that, should be a cause for celebration.

Regards,
KEITH FLETT,

London N17.

Talking rubbish

Sir,

On behalf of Cleanaway (Eye 1132) may I draw your attention to one of the recycling industry's largest problems: "contamination, contamination, contamination".

Working closely with Lambeth council, we collected 13,450 tonnes of recyclables in 2004/5, a massive increase of 62 percent on the previous year's 8,291 tonnes. This could be increased still further, however we are quite simply unable to accept contaminated materials from residents, as it cannot be reprocessed. This is an issue faced by all local authorities and their waste and recycling contractors. Indeed, it is the responsibility of my recycling staff to identify contaminated recycling – hence the transparency of the recycling bags – and leave them for our refuse teams to unceremoniously despatch to landfill.

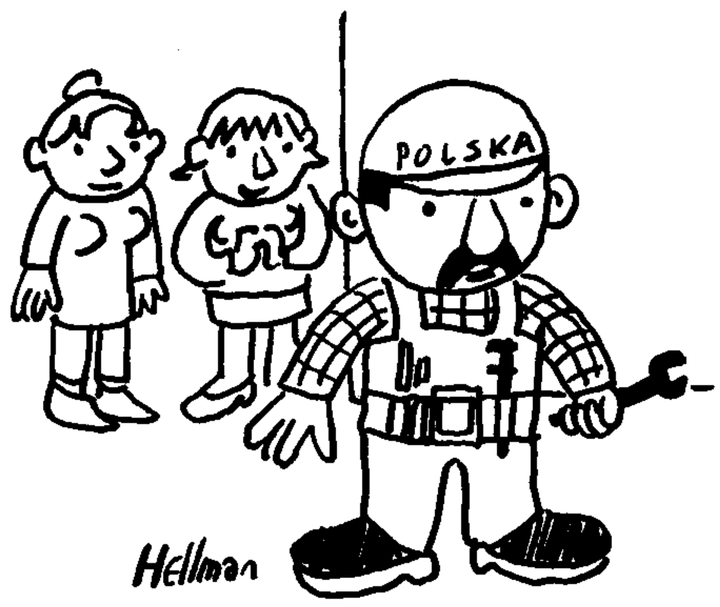
Local authorities collect a range of household recyclables dependent on the nature and type of their local reprocessing facilities. In Lambeth, for example, we are currently unable to accept textiles or plastic food containers as part of the kerbside collection scheme. Working with Lambeth communications team, we endeavour to raise awareness of recycling – including the materials which can be recycled – through education and communication campaigns. The objective being to reiterate the message so that residents are constantly reminded of how, when and what they can recycle.

Nevertheless, I am grateful to the Eye for bringing this matter to its readers' attention. You have assisted us further in our ongoing campaign to rectify such problems through "education, education, education".

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT SEEAR,

Senior Contracts Manager, Cleanaway Ltd, Lambeth.

● *Nice attempt to blame the residents for mixing up general rubbish with the recycling, Mr Seear. But our Lambeth correspondent says that on three occasions he has witnessed Cleanaway binmen hurling recycling bags straight in to the crusher without any inspection whatsoever. Ed.*



"Yes, now we're using Bobski The Builder – SO much cheaper"

Railing about roads

Sir,

Re: M6 Toll Motorway. The M6 toll motorway sells its services on pure market principles, rather than on a long-term government contract as is usual in PFI schemes (Eye toll-ed you so, Eye 1133). The practical consequences throw into light the truth about road freight economics.

As you point out, heavy lorries, through taxes and duty, cover only a small fraction of the maintenance costs they cause to roads. The shortfall has to be made good mostly by taxing other road users (this is leaving aside arguments about the wider environmental and health costs of road traffic). It should come as no surprise that the M6 toll owners, faced with the harsh reality of these costs, find it uneconomic to sell space to lorry operators at a price those operators are willing to pay. This is the market's way of telling the haulage industry that, in true economic terms, it isn't worth the candle. We would all be better off if there was a shift back towards more local manufacture and distribution using smaller lorries, sent more goods by rail (remarkably, rail freight operators do have to pay access charges at a rate that reflects the true wear and tear on the track etc), and generally moved things around less. That is what market forces say, when they are not shouted down by government subsidy.

Yours faithfully,
CHRISTOPHER PADLEY,
Market Rasen, Lincolnshire.

LUVVIES

"I thought of *Melrose Place* as like Andy Warhol, and I think of this show as Kandinsky or Francis Bacon."

MARCIA CROSS
(Desperate Housewives)

Submitted by Paul Mattesini

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Nose for detail

Sir,

I fondly thought that you were above such ungrammatical antics as the dreaded unrelated participle and that you left that sort of thing to the "quality" dailies, notably the Times. But what's this? "Known as 'nasal flossing', the Sun's managing editor is blessed with the ability to snort..." (1133, p7 – I blush to quote further). Or perhaps the Sun's editor really is known as "Nasal Flossing", in which case you need capitals.

I know, I should get out more.

Yours pedantically,
BRIAN LILE,
Aberystwyth.

Raising the roof

Sir,

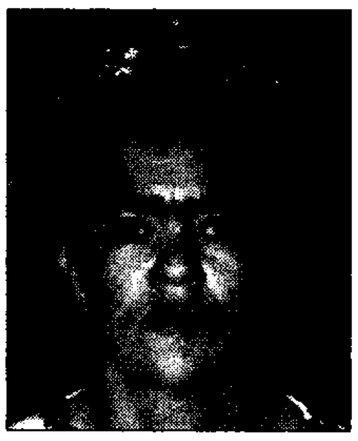
"Antiquarian prejudice" indeed! More a case of journalistic prejudice I fear. As Piloti knows, the decision about when to "restore" and when to conserve is rarely straightforward. Each case must be taken on its own merits and each scheme carefully assessed to ensure that the approach is appropriate to the particular building or monument. Having given the proposals at St Columba's very careful thought, we have in fact ***agreed*** *to the proposed re-roofing and we're slightly puzzled therefore to read that we haven't!*

So, a hair shirt for Piloti in this instance.

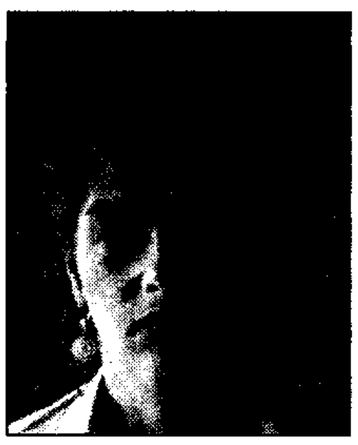
MALCOLM COOPER,
Chief Inspector, Historic Scotland.

Outdoor Bowels for the Disabled
Wednesdays, 4pm – 6pm
John Innes Park, Mostyn Road,
Merton Park.
My Merton

Lookalike



Emin



Kahlo

Sir,

Both Tracey Emin and Frida Kahlo have exhibitions on in London at the moment. How long will it be before our Tracey cultivates her eyebrows to match those of the more famous feminist icon Ms Kahlo...?

Yours etc,
ENA B. RUSHTON,
London W1.

SOLUTIONS

"Jonathan Fry & Co. Bespoke Wealth Preservation Solutions" – *financial advisers*

"Language Solutions International" – *translators*

"Marital Solutions" – *sex shop in Bristol*

"Rolls Royce provides innovative power solutions to our customers across the world" – *engines*

"IPSO Stainless Laundry Solutions" – *washing machines*

"Camden Parking Solutions" – *traffic wardens*

"Swisher: The Total Washroom Solution" – *toilet cleaners*

All submitted by readers

Hitchen time

Sir,

In 2001 when George Galloway described Christopher Hitchens as "the greatest polemicist of our age", he was probably right (Private Eye, 1133).

In 2005 when he described Hitchens as a "drink-sodden ex-Trotskyist popinjay and useful idiot" he was definitely right.

If a week is a long time in politics, four years can seem like an eternity.

NOEL HANNON,
London SW8.

Star bores

Sir,

With reference to your story about Anakin Skywalker being made a Lord, surely everyone knows that it was not Vader who was contracted to create the clone army, it was the Kaminoans who were contracted to create the army by Lord Tyranus, who of course is Count Dooku.

I really did hope that the day I saw my name in Private Eye it might be for something more intellectual.

ROBERT WHITE,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Once separated from the rest, the baboon's a sitting duck."
STEVE LEONARD, BBC1
(Chris Ralls)

"It looks to me like he has cramp in both groins."
ANDY TOWNSEND, ITV
(Andrew Murray)

"Arsene Wenger's lips are firmly sealed on Sir Alex Ferguson."
CHRIS SKUDDER, Sky News
(Anon)

"It would be like chasing a dead duck around the farmyard..."
CHRIS PATTEN, Radio 4
(R.G. Hart)

"I'll be back in just 15 minutes in an hour's time."
KIRSTY YOUNG, Channel 5
(Tom Haggie)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF A SUCCESSFUL BUILDING?
GETTING THE PROPORTIONS RIGHT.
SALE PRICE THREE TIMES WHAT IT COSTS TO BUILD.
HOUSE FOR SALE £10,000

GLOBAL-EYES

TWO judges in the Indian state high court of Madhya Pradesh have thrown a lifeline to Dow Chemicals in its continuing attempts to deny responsibility for the role of its subsidiary, Union Carbide, in the Bhopal gas disaster.

They have decided that *Indian* authorities should clean up the heavily polluted plant and decontaminate the drinking water used by thousands of Bhopalis.

The ruling postpones indefinitely any finding on the question of who is actually liable and comes at a handy time: it gives Union Carbide the chance to foreclose legal action against it in New York, brought by some of the Bhopal gas explosion survivors. A court case, with US rules of disclosure, could have been *so* embarrassing.

Meanwhile Bhopal police have been ordered to crack down on demonstrators. Last week a group of local women went to ask the Gas Relief Tragedy Department why it had done nothing to provide them with safe water. Police broke up the meeting with punches, kicks and rattan canes.

EVER since Japan surrendered in August 1945, one of its highest priorities has been to wriggle out of compensating war victims. (It's been greatly helped by generations of foreign correspondents who have reported from Tokyo without mentioning this historic injustice.)

The contrast between Japan's treatment of war victims and Germany's is glaring. Japan has paid a mere $1bn compared to Germany's $70bn-plus, even though Imperial Japan's victims outnumbered those of the Nazis by at least three to one.

Over the years, whenever the subject of Japan's war legacy arose, establishment surrogates at the Tokyo press club turned the discussion into a debate about whether Japan's war apologies had been heartfelt enough. Correspondents were permitted to be as rude as they liked in parsing Tokyo's words so long as they didn't mention the compensation issue.

Then in 1997 Iris Chang published a best-seller on the Nanking massacre. Her comments finally precipitated what Tokyo had long feared: a flood of class-action lawsuits in American courts. But the lawyers were too late: most would-be claimants were dead and much evidence had disappeared. As Tokyo had hoped, justice delayed proved to be justice denied.

The Tokyo propaganda establishment works hard to keep foreign hacks away from the subject – you don't want to miss out invitations to lucrative seminars or upset Japanese advertisers, etc – and if you do "mention the war crimes", you will be harassed for the impertinence. Poor Chang died last year aged 37 in a reported suicide.

WHEN the *Eye* revealed the lavish lifestyles of some westerners working for non-government organisations in Afghanistan, there was much resentment in Kabul – and not just from Afghans fed up seeing others spend their money.

As we reported, in 2004 only 16 percent of the $4.5bn pledged at the Tokyo conference actually reached the Afghan government. The rest was in NGO bank accounts, some of it destined to be spent on guesthouses, land cruisers, widescreen TVs and recreational drugs.

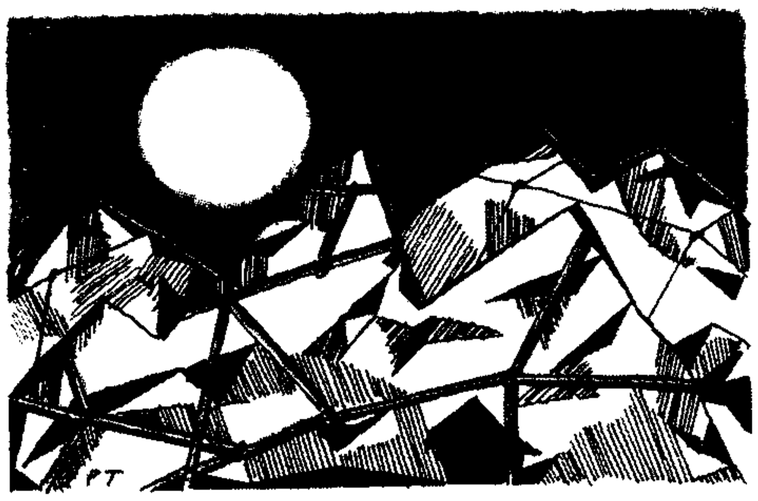
Gordon Mortimore, former country representative of the Washington-based NGO, Population Services International, was particularly incensed by the article and wrote furiously: "It is outrageous of your correspondent to give the illusion that we are all highly paid mercenaries whose only function is to party and rip off the locals." Sadly Mortimore is no longer employed by PSI. By his own admission, it has accused him of embezzling $60,000 following discovery of a hole in the accounts.

Banned from returning to his Kabul digs, Mortimore has been asking colleagues to look after his stuff – including his drug stash: "The smokable is in the small cabinet beside my TV in the bedroom... " he says in a widely leaked email. "Please just take my stuff out and enjoy – there is quite a bit of it."

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Climate change is happening today," Stavros Dimas of the European Commission informed members of the Brookings Institute in Washington, "and here is a concrete example of how we in Europe are combating it. At the Andermatt ski resort in Switzerland, the Gurschen glacier has melted so much over the past fifteen years that the top is now twenty metres below the cable car station, and skiers can no longer reach it when there is no snowfall. But do not despair, because plans are afoot to cover part of the glacier with giant insulating foil



during the spring, and if the experiment is a success, the whole glacier will soon be completely wrapped up in metal during every summer."

Carlo Danioth, head of mountain rescue services in Andermatt, gave further details of the plan. "We will initially cover around 30,000 square feet of the upper Gurschen glacier at the beginning of May, as a test. The foil will reflect almost all of the sun's rays, which we think will sharply reduce the rate of melting. Other resorts like Saas-Fee and Titlis are planning to test similar schemes this summer, and we think this is a sensible way to preserve most of the glaciers in the Alps."

However, some environmental groups have criticised the scheme. "We cannot stop the glaciers melting by wrapping them in foil," said Raimund Rosewald of the Landscape Protection Foundation. "It's absurd." *(Daily Times [Pakistan], 23/3/05. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

– ● –

● *"Plastic surgery is good for dogs," Dr Edgard Brito told reporters from his veterinary clinic in Sao Paulo. "Why shouldn't a dog be beautiful? Beauty is desirable. We all like talking to someone who looks good and smells nice. It's the same with dogs. It's reasonable to use surgery to make a dog more attractive. What's unethical about that?"*

Dog breeder Anita Alt then praised the skill of Brazil's leading pet cosmetic surgeon. "He's a miracle worker," she said, as she displayed her miniature schnauzer Brutus for the cameras. "We imported Brutus from Argentina to be a show dog, and he was perfect in all details except one. Unfortunately, one of his ears started drooping, which would have disqualified him from top competitions. So Dr Brito started treating his ear by injecting it with Restalyne and now it stands up permanently. He's incredible."

Dr Brito's treatments have angered animal welfare groups, and other dog breeders. "It's unethical for a surgically-enhanced animal to win a top show," declared canine judge Suzanna Blum. "A dog may have surgery to correct imperfect teeth or a crooked tail, and then get first prize at a show. At that point, it commands huge stud fees, even though it has a concealed genetic defect. In any case, I regard it as mutilation."

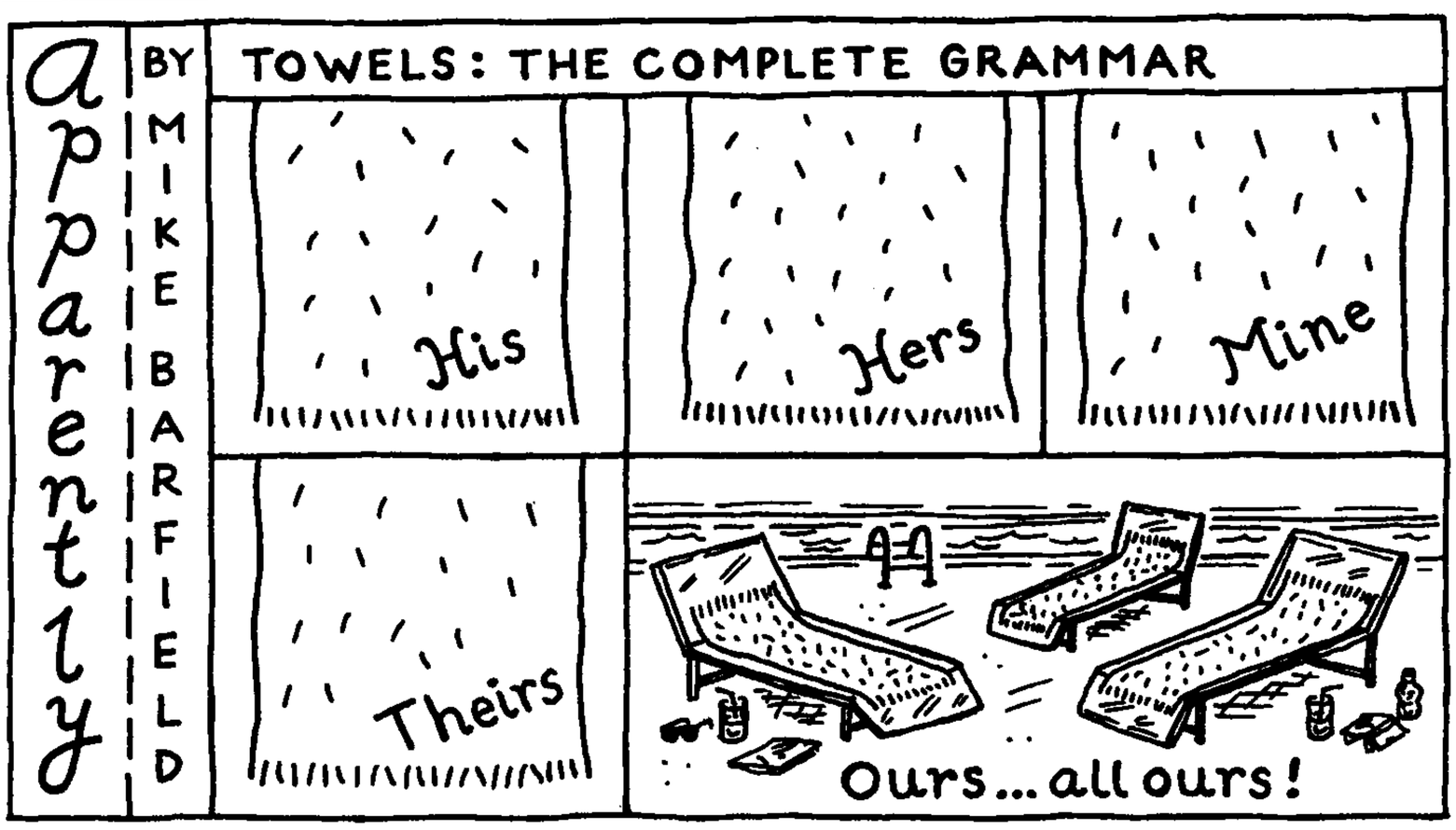
But Dr Brito was unrepentant. "I perform many procedures, from nipple tightening and eyebrow correction to wrinkle reduction and even a full canine facelift. But I agree that vets should not conceal hereditary defects. And here at my clinic, I would never attach an artificial testicle." (Cosmetic Surgery Association News [Oklahoma], 19/3/05. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

– ● –

● "The main goal of the Law on Names is to preserve Estonian traditions," Enel Pungas of the Interior Ministry's population affairs bureau told the Parliament in Tallinn. "We don't want citizens naming their children after a science-fiction character or an international celebrity or someone from a foreign TV soap, or just making up a name. But if a name already exists within the cultural traditions of Estonia, then it can be given to an Estonian child."

Pungas then outlined the nomenclature problems that have afflicted Estonian bureaucracy in recent years, since the country began to open itself up to outside influences. "With many names nowadays, it's impossible to be sure if they even belong to a girl or a boy. The law will restrict the use of unusual first names with improper linguistic meanings that are currently fashionable, such as *Aita Leida Kuusepuu*, which means 'Help find a Christmas tree.' It will now be illegal to give foolish names to girls, such as *Angry, Silli*, or *Kustuta*, which means 'Delete,' and boys can no longer be called *Mango, Eros*, or *Amor*. We are not trying to limit parental creativity, but from now on, if the chosen name is not on the official list, then it will not be legal."

The law came into force on March 31st. *(The Baltic Times, 6/4/05. Spotter: Anon.)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo

And you remember that last week I talked about two very important word beginning with the letters 'R' and 'E'.

They were 'Respect' and 'Refrain'.

Well this week I've got another one, and, no, Rashid, it's still not 'Resign', and that joke is still not funny and clever and it's wearing very thin. Like my patience with Mr. Geldof! But more of that later.

No, the word I have in mind this week is 'Reflection'. It's what you see when you look in the mirror, unless of course you're Mr. Howard (when you wouldn't see any thing, because he's a vampire!)

"A time for reflection". That's something we're all very much in need of these days!

People are always coming up to me and asking "Vicar, what are you going to do?" about such and such a thing.

And the answer is "I'm not going to do anything. I'm simply going to reflect" on whatever it is.

That's what's important, when things don't turn out quite as you expected (not that they don't, but it's just that sometimes they do!)

This week, as you've all probably gathered, we've experienced a little bit of 'turbulence' over our very important Oecumenical Union project along with all our brothers and sisters in other countries across Europe.

It seems that some of the Congregations in France and Holland are not entirely happy with the way we've been running things!

And once again I hear the cry going up "Vicar, this is terrible. It's all coming apart. You've got to do something!"

Well my answer is "hey, I am doing something! I am reflecting. I am taking stock. I an thinking very hard about the way ahead. I am asking that very difficult question which we all of us have to face at one time or another in our lives, which is "I know I am right, but why can't all these silly people agree with me?"

So to anyone who wants to come up to me in Tesco, or anywhere else, and say "Vicar, it's all gone pear-shaped – why don't you admit it?" my reply will be to push them into the fresh fruit counter and say "look who's pear-shaped now!"

For all those who might be feeling suicidal or depressed about the so-called failure of our oecumenical project, I would merely ask them to 'reflect' on the wise words of that holy man St. Raw in his letter to The Guardian, "there is no such thing as a disaster. It is merely an opportunity waiting to happen."

Isn't that something worth spending time 'reflecting' on?

And talking of reflection, something our talkative friend Mr.Geldof might consider 'reflecting' on, as he goes around telling everyone that we've got to 'save Africa', is the fact that someone has already decided to save Africa, and it's not Mr. Geldof!

No, Rashid, it's not Mr. Brown either, and if you're going to carry on being silly, I'm going to have to exclude you from our Sunday club!

No, the person who has been going on about the need to save Africa long before Mr. Geldof had even heard of it was your own vicar!

And when it comes to playing the guitar and writing songs, I think you'll find that I am probably ahead of our Irish friend there too!

In fact I have written a brand-new chorus for this week's Evensong entitled 'Save the World'

"Don't they know it's Christmas
Now that I am here,
Africa can live again
Without hate or fear.
Save the world, save the world.
(repeat)

Words and music T. Blair.

Yours

Tony

The vicar takes time out for "reflection" – as seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

Parish Postbag

A Letter from The Office of Ms Cherie Booth Q.C.

Dear Sir,

It has come to my notice that a number of your parishioners have been making allegations to the effect that I am seeking to take pecuniary advantage of my position as the wife of your vicar. This innuendo has apparently been inspired by the fact that I am shortly to give a lecture in Washington. It is only by the purest chance that my lecture happens to coincide with a long-arranged visit by my husband to his friend the Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter Day Morons, along with Sister Condy, Brother Rumsfield and other high ranking Morons. The fact that my talk is called 'How to make money out of being the vicar's wife' has no bearing whatever on these unfounded and slanderous allegations, and I hereby warn any parishioner who is party to repeating them that I shall not hesitate to issue a writ of scandalum magnatum to be brought before the supreme court of the land, namely my friend Mr. Falconer. You have been warned!

Yours faithfully
Cherie Booth

Letter From the Former Church Warden, Mr Mandelson

Dear Sir,

In the light of the sad news from the European Outreach Programme, now would scarcely be the right time for the vicar to even think of stepping down.

If there is one person with the experience, knowledge, wisdom and humanity to guide the European Mission through the choppy waters that lie ahead, it is the Reverend Anthony Blair, M.A. Oxon.

To think of a lesser person, possibly Scottish, possibly rather shabbily dressed and possibly with a dour, hangdog expression unlikely to appeal to anybody let alone the cosmopolitan modern European ministers of the continent, would be folly.

No, the vicar must remain for at least the next ten years and possibly longer with the assistance of his faithful and able servants.

Yours faithfully and ably,

P. Mandelson
The European Outreach Mission,
Rue des Matelots,
Bruxelles.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

Davis?

Yes – It's Willetts v. Davis In The Fight That No One Is Talking About

Willetts?

by Our Political Staff **Quentin Lettsgiveup**

NOT SINCE Gladstone and Disraeli set the house on fire has there been such a battle of the giants, writes nobody.

In one corner, the bloke no one has ever heard of. In the other, the man everyone knows nothing about.

Make no mistake – in the coming months, the names of who-he and whatshisface will be on everyone's lips as they slug it out for the crown of the top political prize in Great Britain – the losership of the next General Election.

The Daily Eyegraph will follow every twist and turn of this dramatic contest as it unfolds – so don't miss it! Order your copy today and get a free meal in one of London's top gastro-pubs in the company of Michael Gove of Notting Hill fame!

How David Davis Will Transform The Tory Party

1 Leader will no longer be bald

2 He won't wear glasses

3 He won't be old

4 He won't be afraid of garlic or crucifixes

5 He will not sleep in coffin

6 Er...

7 That's it.

HOUSE WIFE IN VIRGIN MIRACLE SHOCK!

by Our Religious Staff **Christina O'Booze**

AN ORDINARY wife and mother of four, living in Central London, today claimed that her prayers had been answered.

The unnamed Catholic woman (C. Booth) told reporters, "I was desperate. I had bought a huge house which I couldn't afford, not to mention two flats and a lot of shoes. My husband is in constant fear of losing his job. And a book I had written with a friend wasn't selling any copies."

Holy Crosshead

She continued, "Then I remembered the miracles that had been worked in the past and decided I would pray to the greatest working mother of all time, myself (surely "the Virgin Mary"? Ed.)

"And lo, it came to pass that the next day the phone rang and I was given £30,000 and a plane ticket."

"Truly, greed (surely "God"?) moves in a mysterious way."

Is this the face of Cherie Blair?
Spotted in a Paella in Westminster

THE DRUGS testers from UK Sport were out and about around the counties before a ball had been bowled in the new season using new powers to dope Test players outside match days for the first time.

The Wisden Cricketer

Nursery Times

Friday, 10 June, 2005

ASBO SERVED ON GOLDILOCKS SHOCK

by **Hans Muslim Anderson**

A SEVEN -year-old girl who broke into a woodland cottage owned by the Bear family has become the latest subject of an anti-social behaviour order.

The court heard that once inside the cottage the little girl had "run amok", stealing porridge, breaking chairs and finally squatting in one of the bedrooms.

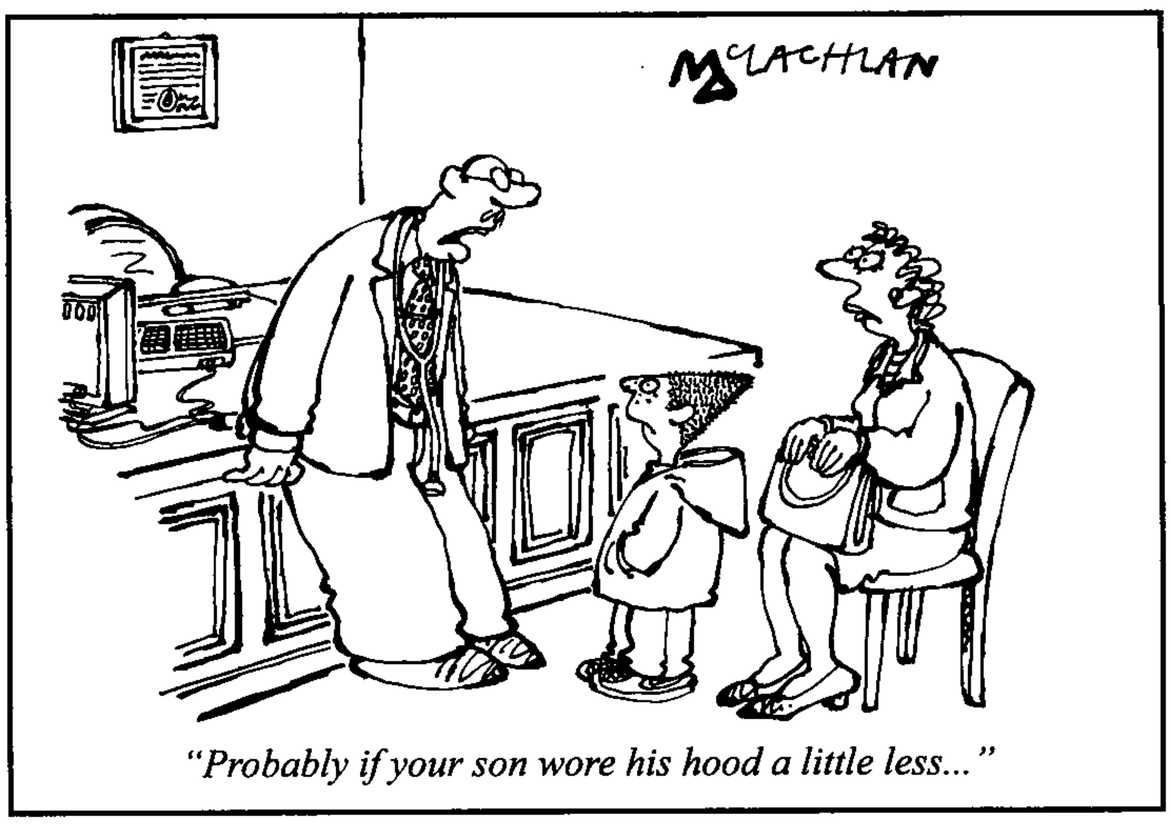
Said Mr Bear, "It was every bear's worst nightmare. We came back from our afternoon walk to find that the cottage had been trashed." He continued, "You never think it is going to happen to you. We are still coming to terms with our trauma and we are all going to family therapy."

Goldilocks, however, refused to accept responsibility for her actions. "I blame my parents," she continued, "for failing to teach me the difference between right and left."

Her mother, Mrs Waynetta Goldilocks, who has 15 other children and lives in an old shoe, said, "I don't know what to do. Basically Goldilocks is a good girl but I blame the school for failing to teach her that she should have nicked all the cutlery rather than just eating the *(contd. p. 94)*

On Other Pages

● Yellow Brick Road – new toll charge **1** ● Peter Pan rushed to hospital following sex charge verdict. **2** ● Neighbour illegally cut down Giant Beanstalk – "It spoilt my view" he says **94**



"Probably if your son wore his hood a little less..."

What You've Missed

BBC Radio 3

Day 94 of the complete works of Beethoven

7.30 Variations on a theme by Berlusconi for Flute, Mandolin and Harp played by the Sudoku Trio

8.00 Four Scottish Folk Songs

1) Are Ye Ready For Me Lassie? Peter McKay (baritone)

2) I'm In The Money The Noo Dame Kirsty Wark (soprano)

3) Are Ye Looking At Me, Jimmy? Gorbals Mick Martin (counter-tenor)

4) Is This Yon Way To Amabrillo? Andrew Neil (bass), accompanied by Kimberly Quinn (pianofortier)

9.15 The Unwritten Symphony No. 10. Performed by The Orchestra of the Age of Absurdity (Conductor Sir Ancient Mariner)

(That's enough Beethoven. Ed.)

'GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH' TO COINCIDE WITH WORLD SUMMIT

by Our Africa Staff **Phil Hyde-Park**

SOME of the world's top political names are to stage a rally in Edinburgh in order to "put pressure" on the scheduled meeting of global pop stars.

The rally is to be called G8 (a play on words from 'Live 8') and will be fronted by the charismatic guitar legend Tony Blair, of the band New Labour. Other top-lining acts promised for the historic gig include American legend George Bush of the Neocons, crooner Jacques Chirac and German Heavy Metal Industry front man Gerhard Schroeder.

Said Blair, "It's time we made these pop stars wake up to their responsibilities. After all, they are the ones who make things happen." He continued, "These people – like Geldof, Sting and the Spice Girls – are the most powerful people on the planet and it's high time they put Africa at

the top of their agenda."

Said Blair, "We're doing our bit, or rather we aren't, and the least these musicians could do is solve world poverty."

Said Sir Bob Geldof, "Fuck off!"

Daily Bush Telegraph

Africa, Monday

In the 21st Century, it is shocking to discover that in some countries in the world there are still children who are sent out to work wearing hardly any clothes and who are ruthlessly exploited by greedy employers. Take the case of Peaches Geldof in Britain who though only 16 is required to write a weekly column for the ruthless Sunday Telegraph Group and to make programmes about teenagers for the greedy global media moguls at Sky TV. How long can we Africans tolerate this scandal that threatens to shame our (*cont'd p94*)

HOW TIMES CHANGE

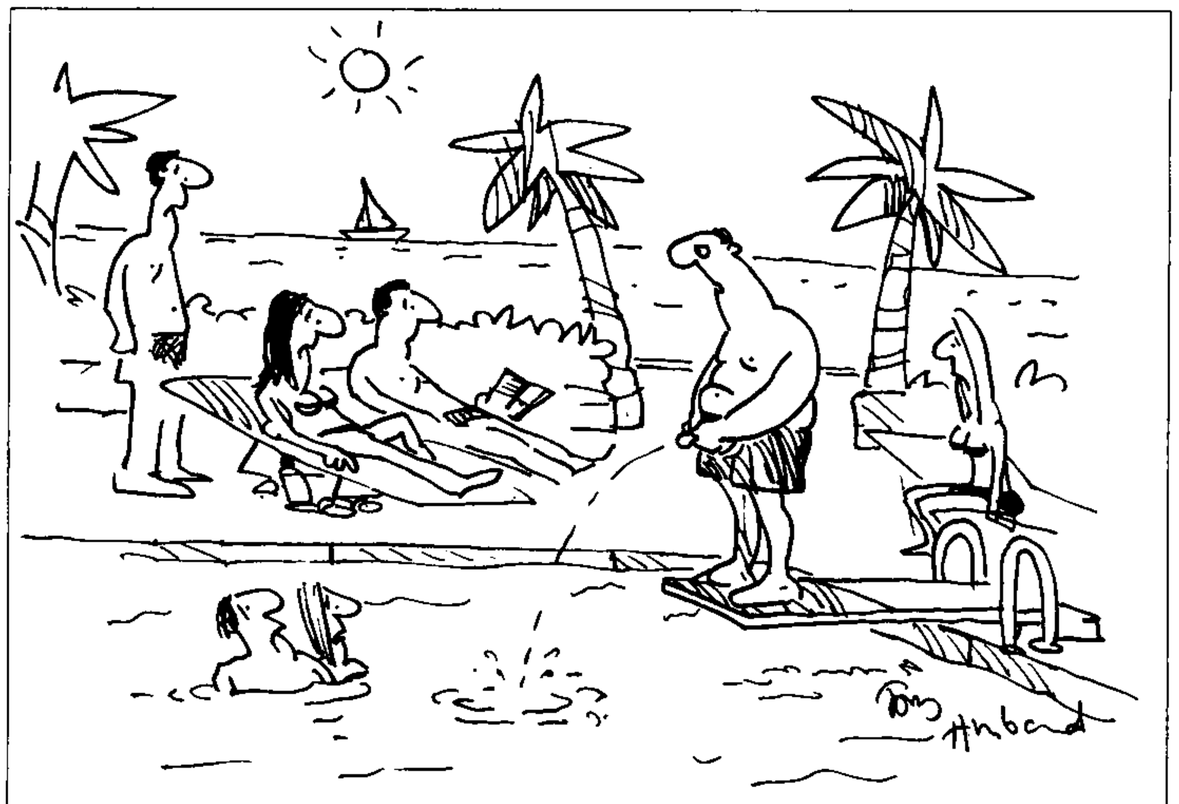
LIVE AID 1984

- Will the Beatles reform?

LIVE8 2005

- Will the Spice Girls reform?

"I'm not sure that's helpful, Bob"



"Stop whinging. Everyone pees in the pool, don't they?"

NEW 'MAKE POVERTY HISTORY' CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

by **Saint Bob Mugabe**

A GROUP of African leaders has today united to create a new movement on the continent "to make poverty history".

Said spokesman President Bkanda from Rumbabwe, "We pledge that from now on there will be no more poverty amongst African leaders. And to that end we promise that we will steal as much money from our people as possible and misappropriate as much foreign aid as we can and ensure free trade at all times with our relatives' companies.

"We further pledge," said Mr Bkanda, "that we will not use this money for famine relief, health or educational programmes, but will only spend it on arms, palaces, cars, alcohol and women."

Mr Bkanda and the other leaders then showed off the bracelets that they were all wearing as a symbol of their campaign. These are made from solid gold and are studded with diamonds to form the words, 'Make Poverty History'.

Mr Bkanda concluded the inaugural meeeting with his famous catchphrase, "Give us your fucking money or we'll lock you up and torture you."

THE DAILY MORON SAYS

AMONGST all the big names invited by Sir Bob Geldof to perform at his Live8 concert there has been one startling omission. Yes, OK, Sir Paul McCartney, Sir Elton John, U2 and Robbie Williams are turning out. But where, oh where, is Crazy Frog?

The *Moron* says this deliberate snub to the nation's favourite recording artist is a disgrace and *(cont. p. 94)*

THE DAILY TORYGRAPH

Letters *to the Editor*

My Views on Tory Leadership from Sir John Major KG

SIR – I was not inconsiderably incandescent with rage when I read your article alleging that I was attempting to influence the election for a new leader of the Conservative Party. I would like to make it in no small measure clear that I did no such thing. Oh no! The suggestion that I am in any way attempting to "stop" Mr. Davis (or indeed any other candidate) is, in my judgement, unforgivable and contrary to the facts. I very specifically went out of my way to avoid saying that Mr Davis should be "stopped". Nor did I hint that Mr Clarke with his very considerable talents and experience, would be an ideal choice to unite the party and to appeal to all those voters in the centre of British politics, whose support will be essential if we are ever again to win an election as I did in 1992. What I did say was that, while in no way favouring any candidate above the others, and let me make it clear, we have at least 28 excellent candidates, all of whom would make superb leaders of the party, in the end the only thing that matters is that the party should choose the right candidate for the job, i.e. Mr Clarke and not Mr Davis

Sir John Major (not 'Mr' as some people still mistakenly address me!)
Greystroke, Grays Inn Road, Grays, Essex

RADIO FOUR

What You Missed

Ken Clarke's All-Time Jazz Greats presented by the Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke MP PC

Kenny Clarke: Hi there, hepcats! And let's groove with a few of the good old good ones from the hot hits of yesteryear!

It's often said that the good die young. And that's never more true than in jazz. I'm thinking of such legends as Jelly-Roll Major, Hotlips Hague, Pinetop Duncan Smith and, of course, Count Michael Howard whose career ended so tragically with a stake through his heart.

But let's start with one of the great classics in the history of the 'Blues' – Fats Soames's immortal *I'm Gonna Sit Right Down And Write Myself A Letter Of Resignation.*

(Boring jazz music plays for a short while until presenter gets bored and wishes to hear sound of own voice)

Clarke: Wasn't that great? But now, from the golden age of dance bands, the legendary 1922 Committee recording of *Hullo Central Office, Give Me Doctor Liam Fox.*

(Further short snatch of scratchy old 78)

Clarke: Mmmmm – jazz! And we end today with that larger-than-life genius with his cigar, his pint of bitter and his legendary trademark Hush Puppies. Who better to blow his own trumpet than the 'King' himself – Kenny Clarke, legendary bluesman and next leader of the Conservative Party.

(Long excerpt of man blowing own trumpet)

Clarke: Well, that's all we have time for today, all you kool kats and beboppers. Next week I'll be playing records by Ted Heath & His Washed-Up Band, Thelonious 'Mad Monk' Joseph and the Normo Tebbs Hot Five – but none by Miles 'David' Davis. Stay cool, and remember – Vote Tory!

MILITARY CADET WEARS UNIFORM SHOCK

THE WORLD was amazed today when sensational pictures were published in the newspapers of a Sandhurst cadet wearing combat fatigues. Said one observer, "Who would have thought that someone in the army would wear a military uniform and carry a gun?" Prince Harry is 20.

(Reuters)

TORY LEADERSHIP LATEST

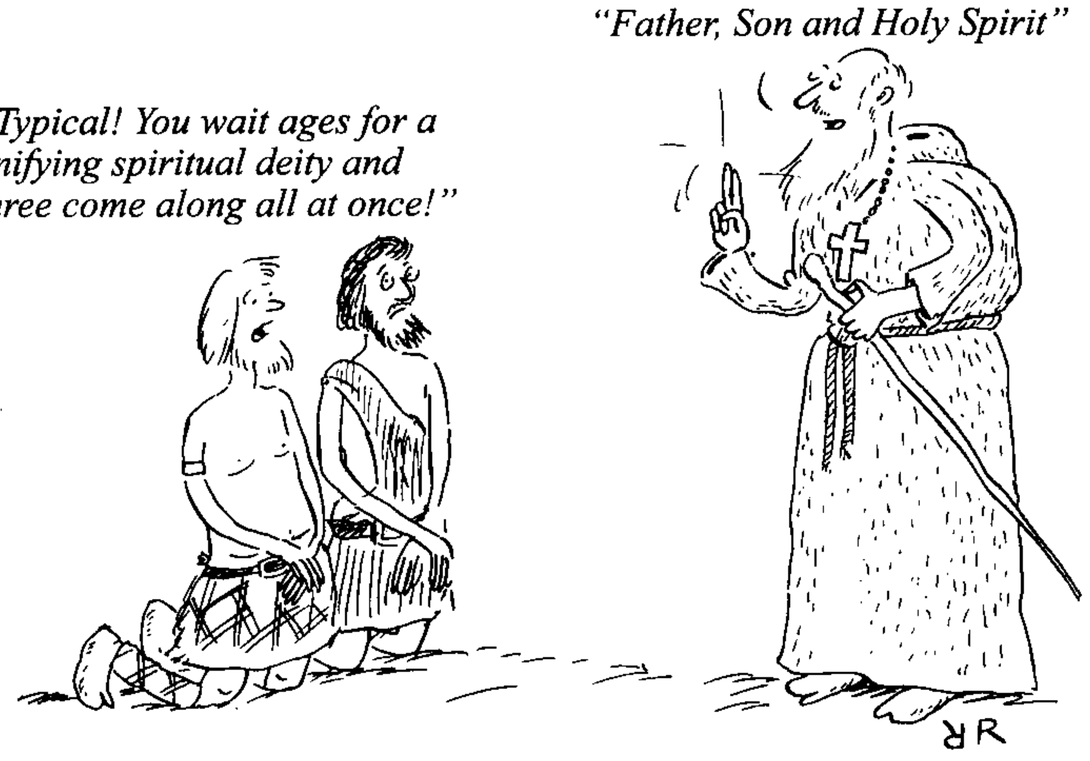
The Man Whose Hour Has Come

The collapse of the European project has one unexpected beneficiary. The Conservative Party is now free to choose as its next leader the one man who can hope to guide them to victory at the next election. Now that the people of Europe have firmly rejected the Euro-federalist dream, this is surely the time for a committed Europhile like Mr Clarke to take over. *(Is this right? Ed.)*

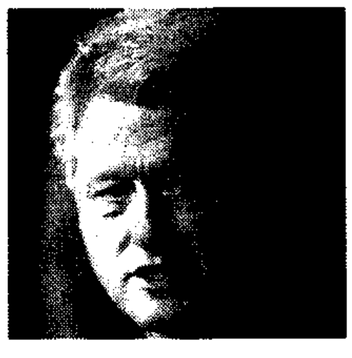
© *All newspapers.*

"Typical! You wait ages for a unifying spiritual deity and three come along all at once!"

"Father, Son and Holy Spirit"



THE INTEGRAL ROLE OF DEEP THROAT IN AMERICAN POLITICS



1974 Deep Throat brings President Nixon to his knees as he's impeached

1998 Deep Throat brings President Clinton to his knees as he's almost impeached.

"So I tied up his hands and feet and got a kitchen knife to chop off his organ and bring an end to his lust once and for all."

The man, who has not been named, was taken to a local hospital where his penis was re-attacked by doctors.

Sky News web page

Your Cut-Out-'n'-Keep Souvenir Guide To The Most Historic Event In The History of Europe

OUI, IT'S NON!!!

by Our European Staff
Russel Sprout

YES, IT'S 'NO'! That was the shock message that rang out yesterday from Calais to Carcassonne, from Limoges to Lille, from Bordeaux to Biarritz *(That's enough French towns. Ed.)*

The French people have delivered their verdict!

In the biggest upset since the French revolutionaries stormed the Bastille and chopped the head off their king, the people of this proud and ancient land have delivered the most almighty snub to their ruling class since the French revolutionaries stormed the *(You've done this bit. Ed.)*

And the message could not be clearer! From Calais to Caen, from Montpellier to Marseilles, from Dijon to Mustard *(Get on with the clear message. Ed.)*

The French nation has spoken with one clear, unequivocal voice.

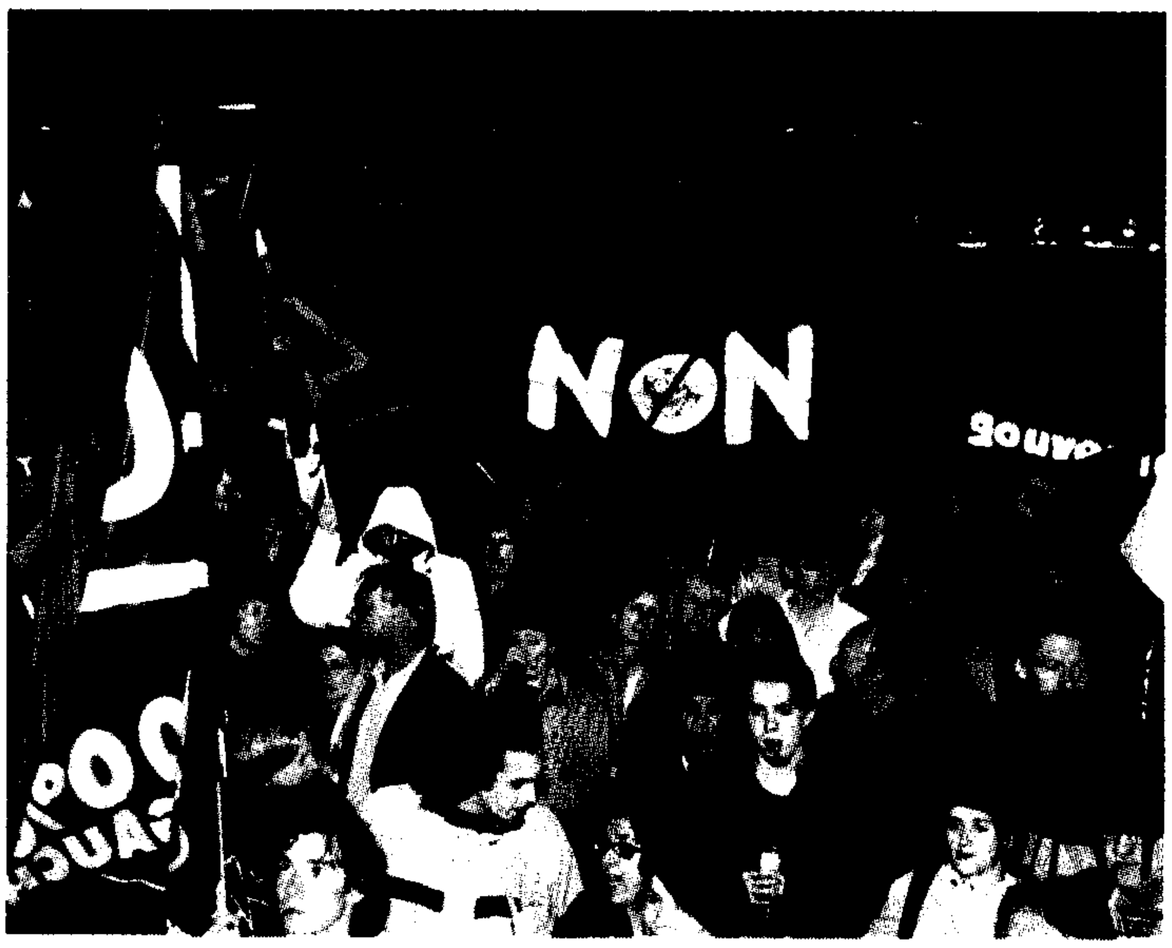
'Non!,' they have said. Which is the French for 'no'. And they mean it!

So what is it that they are saying 'no' to?

Who cares?! All that matters is that they have said no.

And as I sit here on the top of the Eiffel Tower, gazing down at a sea of happy, laughing, pretty Parisiennes holding up their banners which proudly proclaim that one immortal word 'non', I realise that I have no idea what I am talking about!

© *All newspapers.*



NEE MEANS JA

by Our Man Who Hasn't A Clue What's Going On **Van der Vote**

HERE, in the land of windmills, clogs and tulips, the people of this tiny corner of the mighty European Union woke up today to find that they had voted 'njop' *(Please check. Ed.)* **and thrown the whole of the Continent into a seething cauldron of uncertainty and chaos.**

From Harlem to the Hague, from Rotterdam to Rembrandt, from Douwe Egbert to Haagen Dazs, the the message could not have been clearer.

"While we love Europe," said one tulip seller in Amsterdam, "we don't want to be part of it."

His sentiments were echoed by a cannabis grower from the little town of Spliff. "We Dutch," he said, "are a proud people, and we want to run our own affairs."

For the bewildered, bloody-nosed bureaucrats of Brussels, this has been the nightmare they never dreamed could happen, as news of the overwhelming 'Njej' sank in.

Said one senior official on the 89th floor of the Commission headquarters, "Of course we wholeheartedly respect the democratically expressed views of the Dutch nation, but we will press ahead with our plans regardless. It is what the Dutch people would really want, if only they were better informed."

As I cycled down one of Amsterdam's legendary canals in the autumn sunshine, I was surrounded by hordes of young clog-sporting Dutch girls asking me whether I would like a nice time.

The answer was, of course, a resounding 'jeh'!

WHY 'NON' MEANS 'OUI' Chirac Explains

by Our French Correspondent **Paris Hilton**

A SMILING President Chirac appeared on state television last night to proclaim his 'unqualified delight' at the verdict of the French people on the EU Constitution.

"In no way," he said, "is this a vote against Europe or the Constitution. In no way is it a vote against me.

"Rather," went on M. Chirac, "it is a perfectly understandable expression of dissatisfaction with the useless little man I appointed prime minister, M. Raffarindum, whom I have therefore sacked.

"In fact, it is quite obvious that the French people are so keen on Europe that they only voted 'non' to encourage us to go much further in the creation of a European Super-France. I mean, of course, Super-State."

He concluded, "I thank you with all my heart for this resounding vote of confidence in myself. I look forward to seeing you all again when we have another referendum again soon under our charismatic new prime minister, M. Cruella de Villepin *(Surely Dominique de Lawson? Ed.)*.

"Vive la France et, in the words of that Great Frenchman Louis XIV, 'le super-état c'est moi'."

The 'Oui' List In Full

A Guide To Those World-Famous French Celebs Who Led The Campaign To Accept The New EU Constitution

Maurice Chevalier
Edith Piaf
M. Hulot
Jean-Paul Sartre
Jules
Jim
Asterix The European

(That's enough French celebrities. Ed.)

UKIP RETHINK FOLLOWS 'NO' VOTE

by Our Political Staff **Peter Obore**

THE United Kingdom Independence Party today welcomed the results of the French and Dutch referenda as marking a new start for European Politics.

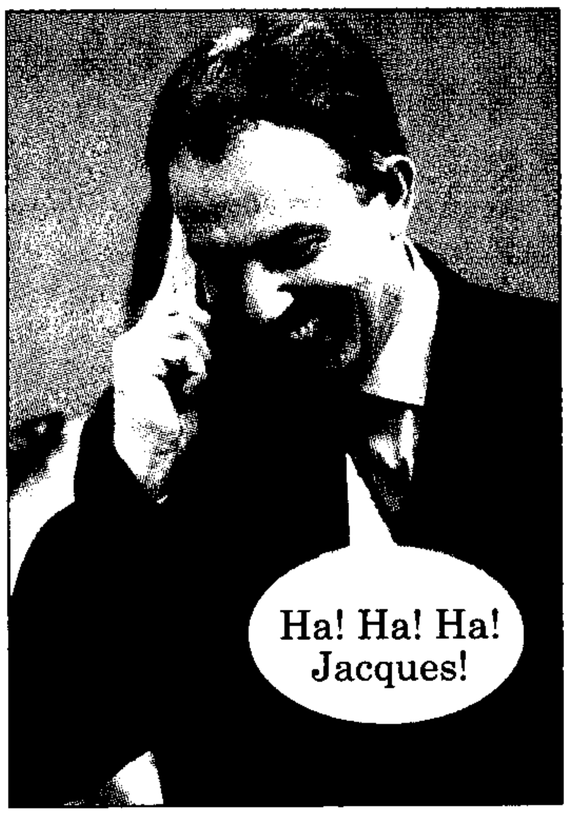
Non-event

"This rejection of the European ideal," said spokesman Nigel Bonkers, "only goes to show how much we have in common with our European partners."

He continued, "In fact UKIP is now proposing to get together with all our like minded Continental Colleagues to form a Pan-European Federation promoting our common interests. It would obviously be sensible to base such an organisation in a central European location such as Brussels and to call it something like the European Union. I'm sorry, I must go and lie down."

CRAZY FROG RING TONE

CRAZY TONE RINGS FROG



THE Sun SAYS

An Apology

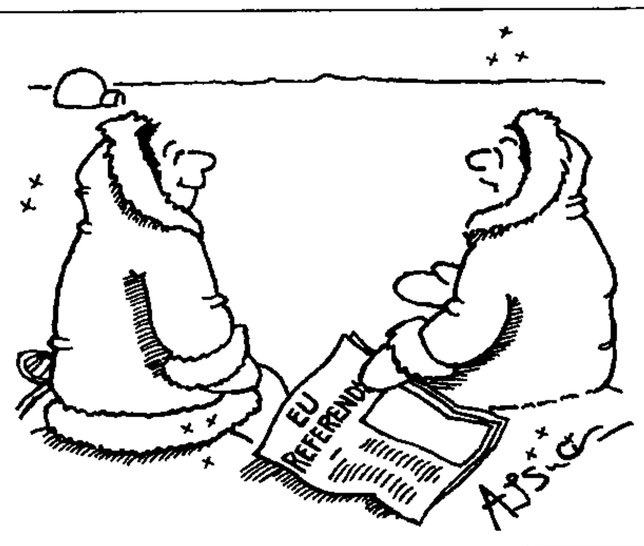
In recent years we may on occasion have given the impression that we were not wholehearted admirers of our French neighbours across the Channel.

Headlines such as 'Hop Off Frogs', 'Frog Off You Garlic-Eating, Wine-Guzzling Onion-Sellers' and 'Who'd Bed A French Bird Who Smells Of Old Cheese And has Hairy Armpits?' may have led readers to believe that we in some way held the people of France in less than total affection and respect.

We now realise that, on the contrary, our French cousins are without doubt the most brave, perceptive, honourable and altogether delightful nation on God's earth.

We offer them our deepest apologies for any confusion which may have arisen, and call on our readers to travel at once to this wonderful country by Eurostar, fill their white vans with cheap lager and fags and salute the most admirable race of people who have ever rallied at the last minute to support Mr Murdoch's policy on Europe.

© *The Times.*



"Apparently in Europe they have 37 different words for 'No'!"

"It's nice to see that craftsmanship is still thriving"

KELLY HOLMES 'SPEAKS OF DESPAIR'

by Our Literary Staff **Lunchtime A'Buse**

BRITISH Olympic champion Kelly Holmes spoke today of the despair of her publishers as they plunged into the depths of depression, after they realised there was nothing sensational in her auto-biography that would justify charging a fortune for the newspaper serialisation.

"However, they instantly cheered up when I remembered that I was a self-abuser who cut myself with knives, and they were soon dancing around their offices for joy and cracking open the bottles of champagne," said the Olympic *(cont. p. 94)*

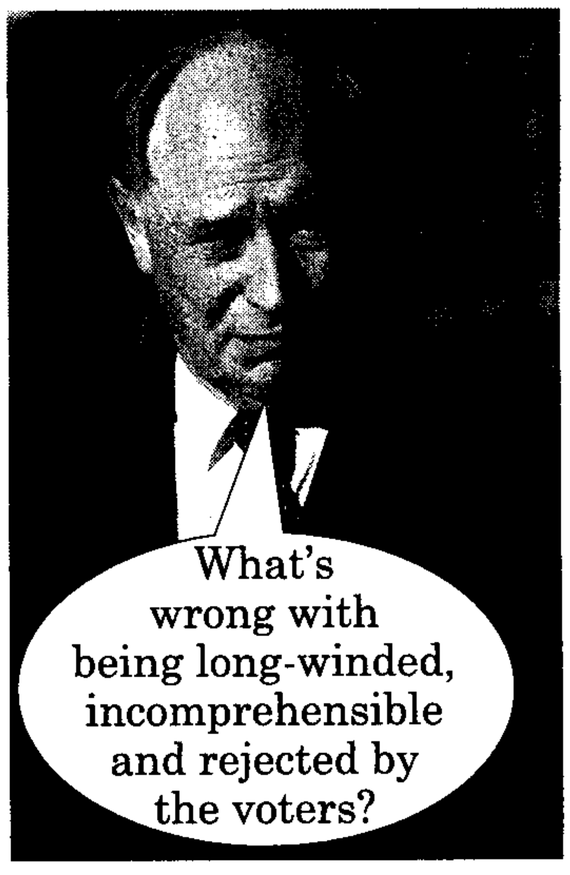
News in Brief

HUNDREDS OF IRAQIS NOT KILLED

THERE were astonishing scenes in Baghdad today, as hundreds of Iraqis gathered in a market square weren't killed in a suicide bombing.

"Not to have hundreds of innocent people killed in this way is something we could never have expected. Naturally we're all in a state of shock," said one local... *(cont. p. 94)*

KINNOCK DEFENDS EU CONSTITUTION



GREASY SPOON TAP-UP DEAL ROCKS NEASDEN

by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In The Corner Of Jock's All-Day Diner With A Camcorder Concealed In His BLT Sarnie

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations last night when the North Circular Football Association (NCFA) imposed a fine of £1.25 on Neasden FC and its manager, ashen-faced 'Ronaldo' Knee.

The record fine follows the governing body's ruling that Knee had engaged in "an illicit act of tapping-up by approaching Dollis Hill defender, Brazilian-born Jose van Hoogstraten in the hope of recruiting him to the goal-starved Neasden squad".

MASSIVE PENALTY

Earlier, the board had seen secretly-shot video footage of the tight-lipped Neasden mastermind apparently asking the 29-year-old Dollis Hill right-sided defender if he could borrow his copy of the *Sun* to check the previous day's racing results.

Last night a defiant Knee told reporters, "We shall use every means available to appeal against this attempt to blacken the good name of Neasden.

"No disrespect to Mr van Hoogstraten, but why would we need to sign him up when we have the strongest defence in the North Circular League?"

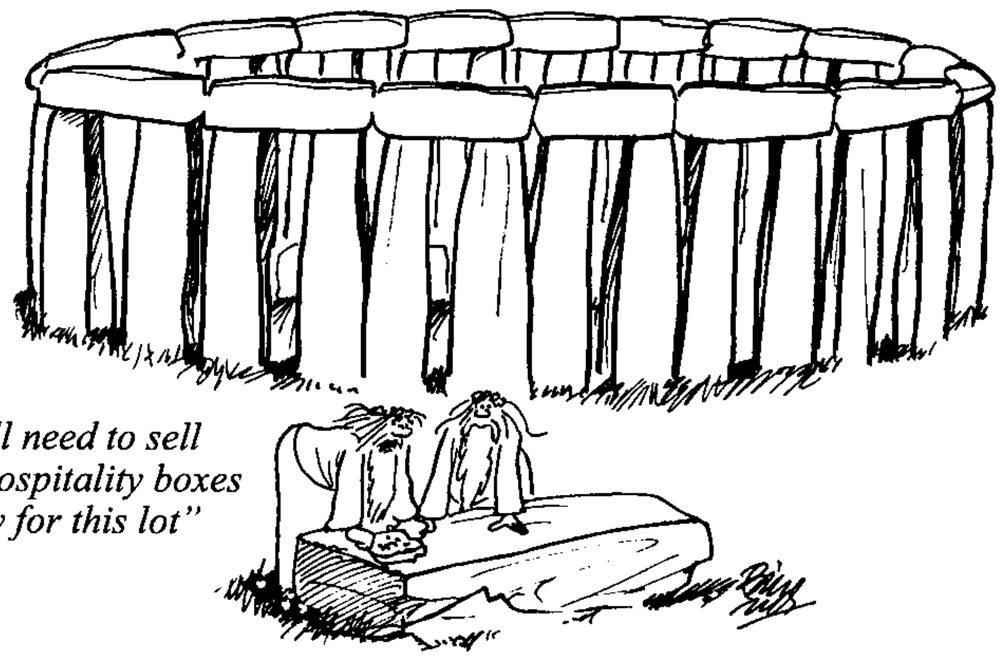
Ron Knee is 59.

Late Result

Pret A Manger Charity Shield

AFC Neasden 0
Dollis Hill 12

(Khodorkovsky 3, Sudoku 3, Walmart 3, Pevsner [o.g.] 3)



"We'll need to sell 300 hospitality boxes to pay for this lot"

GLENDA SLAGG

THE GIRL YOU CAN'T GET TOO LITTLE OF!!

■ ANNE ROBINSON!?!?? Aren'tchasickofher?!? Everywhere you look, there she is a-grinnin' and a-gawpin' out at you from the paper – tellin' you how she's had a facelift, or she's selling her house, or she's battling some disease or other!!?! Who cares?! Cut it out, Anne – and I don't mean your nose!?! I'll tell you who's the Weakest Link!?!! *You* are! Goodbye!

■ HATS OFF to TV's Anne Robinson!?! The glamorous redhead who still looks great at 94?!? And she's brave enough to open her heart and tell us about the trials and torments of selling her house, having a facelift and battling a life-threatening disease!?! God bless you, Anne – you're an inspiration to us all!!?! (Thanks to you, my own house is now on the market!!?! 1 Bed, 1 Recep, Kitchen/Diner, Patio Garden overlooking railway. Offers over £6 million.)

■ JANE FONDA!?!! Aren'tchasickofher!?!! Telling us all that stuff about her miserable private life!?!! And doesn't she look terrible, considering that she's only 94!!?! Barbarella??! More like Babar The Elephant!!?! Go back to Hanoi and bomb yourself!!?! Geddit?!!

■ JANE FONDA!?! I'm getting Fonda and Fonda of you!!? Geddit??! You're an inspiration to billions of women all over the world with your brave keep-fit videos and your inspirational books about your miserable private life!?! Gawd bless you, Jane!!?! And you *still* look fantastic, even though you're 94!?!!

■ HERE they are – Glenda's Referendum Romeos!?!

● **Dominique de Villepin** – France's dishy new Prime Minister. When I say "Non" I mean "Oui"!?! Geddit?!?

● **Jan Peter Balkenende** – He's the dishy Dutchman from the land of tulips and windmills. When I say "Nee" I mean "Ja"! Geddit?!?

● **Jack Straw** – Britain's Foreign Affairs supremo!?! Sorry, Jack – in your case, when I say "No" I *mean* "No"!?!?!!

Byeeee!!!

THE BIBLICAL TIMES

FRIDAY 10 JUNE 2005

Lazarus – Shock Comeback Stuns Fans

by Our Man On The Spot ***St Luke***

THEY are calling it the biggest comeback the world has seen since Liverpool FC beat AC Milan on penalties after extra time.

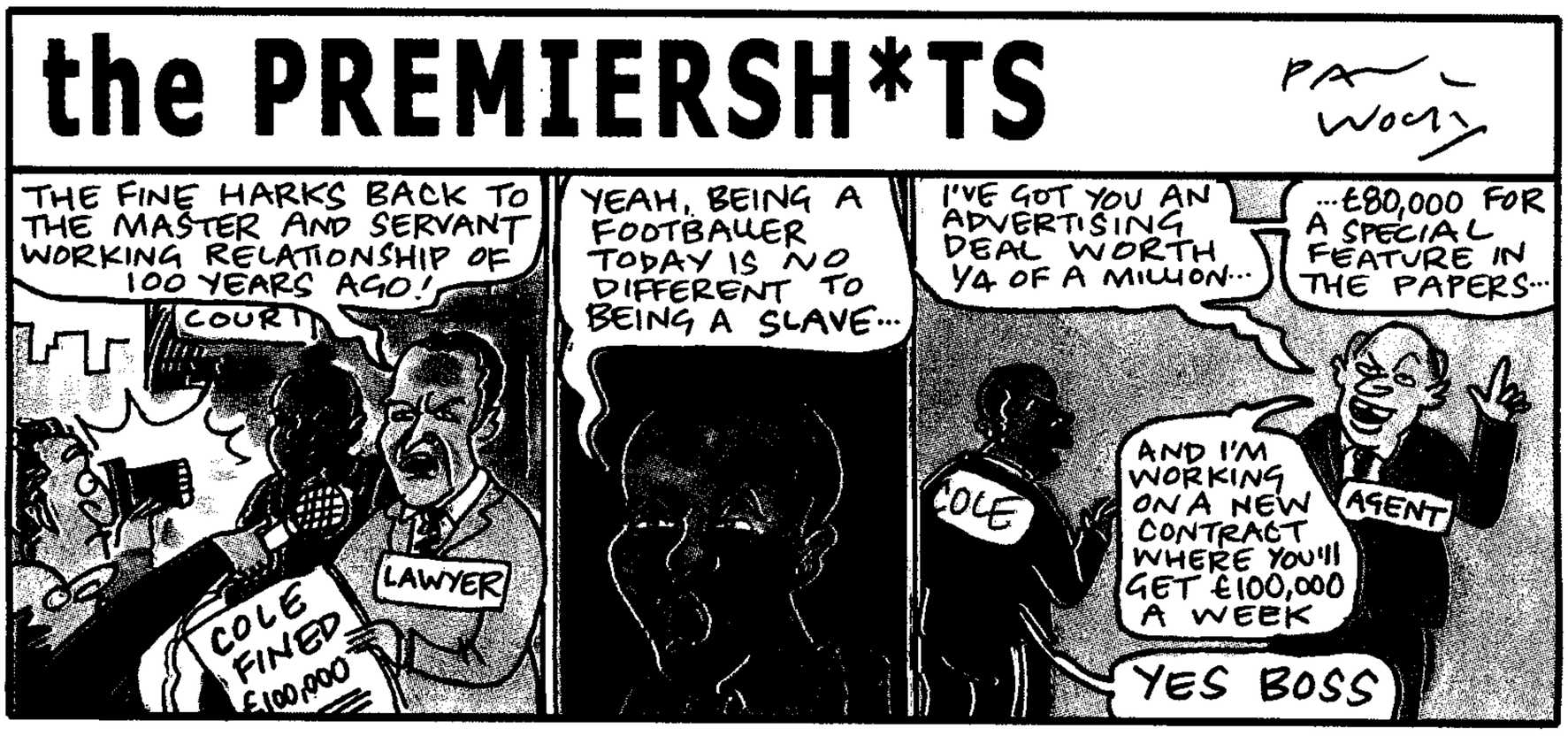
Said Judean resident Lazarus: "I was dead and buried, just like Liverpool at half-time. In terms of being deceased, I was three-nil down without a prayer.

"Then I heard this voice say, 'Come on, son, take up thy bed and walk'– and, before I knew it, I was back from the grave. There's only one word for it – it's a miracle, just like when Liverpool won on penalties. Although obviously nowhere near as important."

● *ON OTHER PAGES: Lazarus's Victory Tour of Galilee.*

● *PLUS: Win a free Lazarus-style bed if you can name which team came back from the dead to beat AC Milan.*

the PREMIERSH*TS


THE FINE HARKS BACK TO THE MASTER AND SERVANT WORKING RELATIONSHIP OF 100 YEARS AGO!
COURT
LAWYER
COLE FINED £100,000
YEAH, BEING A FOOTBALLER TODAY IS NO DIFFERENT TO BEING A SLAVE...
I'VE GOT YOU AN ADVERTISING DEAL WORTH ¼ OF A MILLION...
...£80,000 FOR A SPECIAL FEATURE IN THE PAPERS...
COLE
AGENT
AND I'M WORKING ON A NEW CONTRACT WHERE YOU'LL GET £100,000 A WEEK
YES BOSS

FOOTBALLER NOT ARRESTED

THE sporting world was in a state of shock following the incredible news that a footballer failed to spend a night in the cells.

An FA spokesman said, "It's a shame when professional footballers fail to make the headlines for all the wrong reasons – at the end of the day these people are role models to millions of juvenile delinquents and... *(cont. p. 94)*

DIARY

There has been an epoch-making moment in this season's Big Brother, or so my Endemol production team informs me.

The seat of the lavatory, or toilet as the contestants prefer to call it (nothing wrong with that – it's hugely important in the 21st Century that we, or rather they, should be permitted to call it toilet, if that's what they jolly well want!) was extensively "soiled" by one or other of the "housemates".

Television historians will wish to know the exact sequence of events. The soiled seat was discovered by "Science", one of the livelier of our Big Brother "housemates" of recent years. Science, I am told, declared, 'Someone's left poo-poo on the toilet seat!' whereupon Roberto claimed total innocence, insisting that he had left the seat in question as clean as he had found it.

At this, Makosi pointed the finger at Roberto, saying he was the last person to have used the "toilet". Unprompted, Anthony spluttered, "I did a shit, I flushed and washed my hands." Some of the housemates then seized on this as an admission of guilt. "Everything is filmed in the toilet so the one who's been shitting will be named and shamed!" said Roberto.

A magic moment. On numerous occasions, Big Brother has been bombarded with snobbish criticisms by the middle-class elite. Many of their complaints have centred on the need to place television cameras in the lavatory. These people have got on their high horses, saying, "Why is there a camera in the lavatory, or the toilet, as it were?"

I tell them it's all about access – access by the people, for the people. And now my point is proven. If viewers had been denied access to the lavatory, they would have had no way of making up their own minds about which housemate had soiled that seat. Are we, as television-makers, really allowed to deny the public their right to know? Why should this knowledge be restricted to a privileged cabal?

It all reminds me of the 1930s, when only those in the social elite knew that King Edward VIII was conducting a liaison with a married woman. If only Lord Reith had installed BBC cameras in the King's lavatory, the general public would have had a much better idea of what was going on – and, today, with interactive TV they would have been able to vote on whether it was His Majesty or Mrs Simpson who had left a "poo-poo" in the Royal lavatory.

PETER BAZALGETTE

The days are now gone when the cultural middle-class hegemony can stick their noses in the air and say, "We don't believe poo-poos on a lavatory seat are good for you – so we're not going to give them to you."

And thank goodness for that. We live in a more democratic age, thank god.

Nowadays, the viewer is in charge. If he or she wants poo-poo on a lavatory seat, then poo-poo on a lavatory seat is what we'll give them. It's all about choice.

For me, there's something very, very positive about the whole soiled seat phenomenon, both in terms of the zeitgeist, and in terms of the future of broadcasting. Our highly professional Endemol psychologists confirm that one can tell an extraordinary amount about someone's inner personality by the way in which they tackle the whole issue of going to the lavatory. For this reason, we investing in an extra camera, with a special waterproof lens, to be placed deep inside the very bowl of the Big Brother lavatory. This will give the viewer unique access to the workings of every single bowel evacuation.

Even the so-called "classic" documentaries, such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* (yawn!) or David Attenborough's *Life On Earth* (double yawn!) couldn't claim to have used these opportunities to extend democracy in the home. So, please let's not be too pious about "the good old days". Sadly, so-called 'proper' documentaries haven't been performing very well. I'm sorry, but viewers no longer want to watch men just walking around talking about "elitist general knowledge" with their trousers on.

It's a terrifically exciting and challenging new development in the whole Big Brother concept. By using their red button, by next year digital viewers will be able to tune into a live Biggie Brother relay, providing them with permanent access to the livecam in the lavatory, so that the second a housemate "goes" they will be able to see it on their screen, the very moment it happens.

Meanwhile, our resident team of psychologists, social scientists, top entertainers and experts will be on hand to analyse each effort. Viewers will then be able to make up their own minds by voting on the best of the day's output and at the end of each day the lovely Davina will carry the winning stool in a specially-designed perspex box out to the cheering public, who will be able to get "up close and personal" with it.

The immortal Jade Goody will be at hand with analysis and personal anecdote. Big Brother experts and historians will ask her how she used to "go" in the Big Brother house, and viewers will then be encouraged to text in their questions on just how regular she was. At last, the barriers are coming down! As we at Endemol say, "There's excitement in excrement!" The ordinary viewer can no longer be denied access to other people's poos – and that must surely be good news for our culture as a whole.

I'm proud to be part of the expanding universe of successful stool-based TV formatting.

Our growing portfolio of modern, forward-looking, shit-based, interactive programming will incorporate cutting-edge formulae such as *Celebrity Biggie Brother*, with James Hewitt, Tony Blackburn and Amanda Platell on the toilet 24/7, in a race to see who can 'go' first; *Stool for Stars*, in which Sharon Osbourne, Rebecca Loos, David Starkey and Bez pick the lucky finalist who, in their opinion, has what it takes to "run and run"; and *Celebrity Flush Pots* with Johnny Vegas, in which discredited former celebrities like Neil Hamilton, Edwina Currie and Major Charles Ingram stand knee-deep in a cess-pit, wearing only their underpants, while up-to-the-minute, cutting-edge, sexually-aware young viewers urinate and excrete all over them!

This represents bold, innovative programming for a multicultural creative environment – and an exciting new interactive emotional challenge for the 21st century.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

PIXIE FROU FROU, I'VE TAKEN YOU OUT FOR A SPECIAL BIRTHDAY LUNCH. THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS EAT YOUR FOOD.
BUT DAD...
I'M NOT HUNGRY...
PIXIE, MILLIONS OF CHILDREN ARE STARVING IN THIS WORLD. WHAT DO I KEEP TELLING YOU?
EXTREME POVERTY KILLS A CHILD EVERY THREE SECONDS.
CLICK
YES MISTER BLOKE?
ANOTHER BOTTLE OF THAT CHATEAUX NEUF DE WHATSIT PLEASE MARTIN.

Literary Review

Vlad-lit

Utterly Monkey

Nick Laird

(4th Estate, £10.99)

FIRST, some introductions. Nick Laird, whose hunky physiognomy stares out from the back flap, is the 30-year-old, Ulster-raised, lately retired London lawyer who has recently trundled up the aisle with Miss Zadie Smith.

Utterly Monkey, his first novel, features a late twentysomething, Ulster-raised London lawyer who, despite a courtesy of manner that would disgrace an orang-utan, strolls off into the sunlight with a glamorous, athletic-looking black girl named Ellen Powell. Oh well, young novelists habitually unpack their own experience into the early work, and no doubt the newly-weds had a fine old giggle over the lavish accounts of Miss P's personal attractions.

The book itself is an odd kind of lad-lit hybrid, half London-bound deserter's view of the Troubles, half corporate satire. Laird's hero, one Danny Williams, not long detached from the lissom Olivia, works for a high-flying band of legal shysters whose chief slave-master, a weaselly cove called Vyse, is about to despatch him to Belfast to oversee due diligence on the takeover of "Ulster Water".

Svelte trainee Ellen is booked to accompany him. Simultaneously there arrives on his Dalston doorstep a battered companion from Ballyglass teendom named Geordie, with £50,000 of loyalist freedom fighter loot concealed about his person. In one of those outrageous coincidences of which the modern novelist is so fond, Geordie just happens to have got chatting on the ferry to the UVF kingpin who wants the money back and to have given him his mobile number.

Over in Belfast, meanwhile, Danny has contrived to do the dirty deed with Ellen, only to discover that Aphrodite here is one of Mr Vyse's recent cast-offs. Worse, producing a clean bill of health for the takeover will guarantee the sacking of all the solicitous Ulster Water employees who remember his old dad ("Anything to the old estate agent, Mark Williams?") and are indisputably his own folk.

Back home, Danny decides to sabotage the report, while Mr UVF, having retrieved his stash, and decided to strike a blow at the heart of the uncaring British establishment, nips off to buy a bomb from some helpful Polish gentlemen in Kilburn. The rest you may easily infer.

Not all of this, alas, inspires a great deal of confidence. There is, for example, a mistake in the very first line, where Edward Heath's "Secretary of State for Northern Ireland", Reginald Maudling, is quoted on the province's awfulness. There was no such post in 1970: Maudling was home secretary. Rather more irksome, though, are the constant reminders that Mr Laird here is really a cut above all this stuff and, left to his own devices, would be much happier meditating some refined little artistic number full of dappled tints and misty sheens. If the early reportage from Danny's flat ("the pale epidermis of unpolished floorboards", a fridge in which an empty mayonnaise bottle sits "like a judge") aren't warning enough, there are the ritzy descriptions of scene – puddles in an Irish field which "wore flushed pink transfers of the sky", or the London horizon marked down as "an invariable cinereous grey".

Gosh! Tony Parsons it manifestly ain't. More ill-advised even than this is the comparison of the law firm's headquarters to "some vast ruminant. The main entrance, painted, polished, was its mouth, the corridors and meeting rooms served as intestines and organs, and the lawyers were like teeth, yellowy-pale, varying in sharpness, and renewable".

All this is a pity, as lurking along the margins of *Utterly Monkey* (Belfast young person's argot for "hideously unattractive woman", by the way) are the beginnings of a quite funny book about corporate life, the crazed megalomaniacs of the partners' hutches or odd flotsam such as Danny's colleague Rollson who spends his time complaining about his office furniture and attending seminars on the correct use of the Dictaphone.

But no, Mr L clearly aims high, and the customary lad-lit round of shags, punch-ups and non-hilarious emails alternates with chapter-heads from Samuel Pepys and Fernando Pessoa. Make no mistake, his next one will undoubtedly be a winsome little Nabokovian art-fest. And if there isn't a glamorous athletic-looking black girl in it somewhere I'll eat my copy of *Pale Fire*.

Charlotte Bronte

Books & Bookmen

■ IN REPORTING the shortlist for the Samuel Johnson Prize, the Independent described nominees Sarah Wise, author of The Italian Boy: Murder and Grave-Robbery in 1830s London, and Suketu Mehta, author of Maximum City: A City Lost And Found, as "first-time novelists". That's the Samuel Johnson Prize for, er, Non-Fiction.

■ THE guide to "what's worth reading and seeing" in the latest issue of *The Week* singled out the new biography of Allen Lane by Jeremy Lewis.

An impressive double, given that it is barely six months since the magazine recommended as its book of the week another book by Jeremy Lewis, the paperback edition of his life of Smollett.

By happy coincidence, Jeremy Lewis's daughter Jemima is consultant editor of... *The Week*.

■ FOLLOWING last issue's article about Macmillan's New Writing initiative, a reader writes to ask if vanity publishing is the same as self-publishing, and why that should be so odious?

In fact they're very different. Self-publishers find the printer, pay the printer, sell the book into the shops (if possible, but few nowadays will touch anything not from the majors) and keep any profit made. Many fine books, including Longitude by Dava Sobel, were self-published at first.

In contrast, vanity publishers take sizeable sums of money from would-be authors for effectively doing nothing. They promise to get the book into the major chains, they promise to promote it, and they even raise the possibility of best-sellerdom and vast riches... but they deliver nothing of the sort.

Instead they print the contractual minimum number of copies for sale to the author's family and friends and bank the surplus. The cost of printing the book (usually unedited) is always significantly less than the amount forked out by the author. It's sharp practice, but it's sadly legal, thanks to the watertight contracts that the starry-eyed authors sign willingly.

'Bookworm'

[354] 5.30PM, THE ELMLEY FOUNDATION THEATRE, £7.00
I Wish I'd Said That
Ned Sherrin
A glittering hour of wit and savagery from the Grand Master of Anecdotage.
Sponsored by Lynhales Nursing Home

The Guardian Hay Festival 2005

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94

Not a Games Person

Julie Myerson

THIS is me. Six years old and standing in a sack in the middle of a field somewhere in England a long time ago.

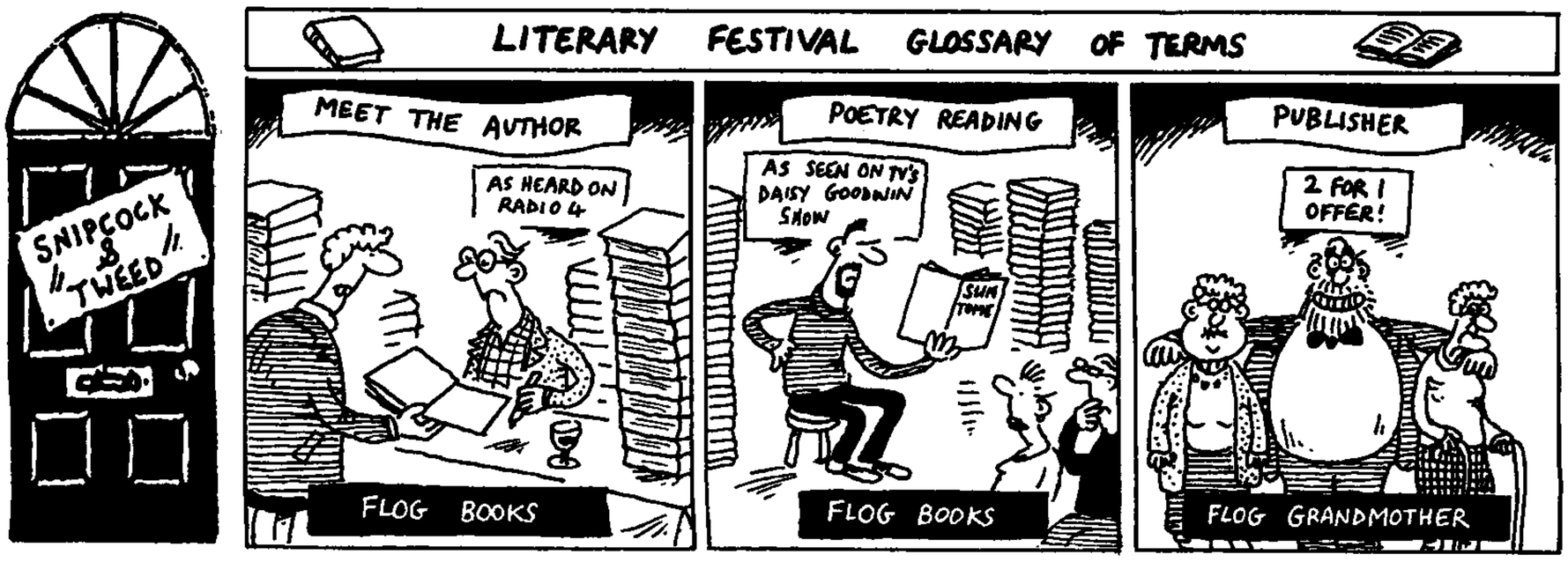
A sad little girl, who is always afraid. Of the hoppy bunnies who might nibble her toes with their eager mouths if she crawls down their burrows, and the cutlery that might leap up from the dishwasher and stab her if she takes her eye from its savage snarl.

Up in the sky there is a bee – could be any bizzy, little twisty bumbly bee with a blacky-brown waistcoat – but you can tell it's going somewhere far away, to some lovely flowers near the fairy ring where the pixies are gathering. And oh I wish I was going there too.

Far away from Sports Day, and sack races, and Miss Grimsditch, who is a big fat lady with bosoms down to her knees who smiles a lot but is sad too.

Like me.

[Will this do? – J.M.]



Pseuds Corner

John Keats, the Romantic poet, concluded "Ode on a Grecian Urn" with the thought: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all/Ye know on earth and need to know."

Had Keats been in Los Angeles this week, he could have predicted the winner of the coming video game console battle between Sony's third PlayStation and Microsoft's second Xbox.

JOHN GAPPER
Financial Times

...now, to make my tea, I need two good-sized mugs. I boil the kettle. The hot water goes into one mug first, stays for a few seconds so the mug is heated, then goes into the second mug. The tea bag goes into the first, hot, mug, boiling water is poured in, to within a couple of millimetres of the top, and the two mugs, one containing brewing tea, and the other containing hot water, are left to stand. After about five minutes, the mug of brewed tea is placed in the sink, where some new hot water (freshly re-boiled) from the kettle, is sloshed into it, so it overflows by about half a mug. This is to stop the well-brewed tea being too strong. The full-to-overflowing mug is now tilted a little bit, so it spills out enough tea to allow room for some milk.

Remember the second mug, full of the hot (now not so hot, but still quite hot) water that was used to warm the first mug? That is now emptied. The tea bag is fished out from the first 'brewing' mug and placed in the bottom of the empty 'warm' mug, where a small splash of warm milk is poured over it. The effect of the hot tea bag, and still-warm milk, is to take the chill off the milk... [continues for quite some while]

HUGH FEARNLEY-WHITTINGSTALL
makes a cup of tea, *Observer Food Magazine*

Recent research, reported in the spring issue of the Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics (which is, incidentally, by far the best publication of its kind I read)...

PAUL JOHNSON
Spectator

Pseuds Corporate

Castle Street has been selected for implementation as an early action exemplar project to demonstrate the aspiration for quality that will help promote Edinburgh's New Town as a prime destination and retail experience.

Sign in Edinburgh city centre

CONTRIBUTORS: Eugene Weber, Strobes, Michael Grosvenor Myer, David Jackson Young.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

ID CARDS

THE WAR ON ERROR

AS BRITISH MPs wake up to the likelihood that ID cards may be a multibillion pound failure thanks to poor biometric trial results and big predicted increases in costs, warnings from the United States don't bode well either.

When the White House office of management and budget investigated 33 homeland security initiatives involving many firms that are potential ID card contractors, it found that only four of the projects had been effective.

Of the ineffective ones, a scheme called US-Visit is particularly relevant to the ID card debate here in Britain. The 10-year, $10bn contract for a computer network to screen foreigners visiting or leaving the US, recording their details and checking them against terrorist suspect databases, was won by Accenture. It promised a futuristic system with "biometric" face and fingerprint recognition, but as the US general accounting office (GAO) found, costs would be well above the $7.2bn estimate and this "very risky endeavour" would probably cost "in the tens of billions".

Even less encouraging was its conclusion that "it is uncertain that US-Visit will be able to measurably and appreciably achieve the Department for Homeland Security's stated goals for the program".

Guess what! Accenture is a likely bidder for ID card work in Britain; and Ian Watmore, head of "E Government" here, is a former Accenture chief executive and ID card enthusiast. When he was appointed last year he suggested he would lead the project. So that's all right, then.

serco
bringing service to life

SERCO is another company that is keen to ride the biometric-identity gravy train.

In Britain it is known for running hospitals and prisons, but the company also belongs to the International Association for Biometrics, a British trade association pursuing identity-related work and chaired by Clive Reedman, a former Scotland Yard fingerprint expert.

Serco is keen to emphasise its computing skills in the US and is likely to bid for ID card work in Britain too. But its so-called database expertise has let it down badly with Britain's National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS).

In 2001 it was awarded the contract to develop this database to record the treatment of drug abusers. It boasted that its solution would be "robust" but distinguished by its "ease of use". *Whoops!* In a quiet renationalisation last year, the treatment agency took over responsibility for the database.

As the health department told the *Eye*: "Developments in the government's drug strategy meant there were changes in the data that was needed by the department. Serco and the department reached an amicable commercial settlement concerning the work undertaken to that point."

Really? Last year when the Welsh Assembly considered buying into Serco's drug treatment database, it decided not to because "problems with the NDTMS (SERCO software system) continue, to the extent that it may still be abandoned. Input times are lengthy and the system is unable to provide reports making analysis impossible".

AVIATION

Flying tonight

TOURISTS staying in the seaside resort of Ramsgate rather than jetting off on cheap holidays, may be in for a rude awakening.

The town, which is just 1,000 metres from the end of the runway at "Kent International Airport" (formerly RAF Manston), faces a summer of late night noise from budget airline EUjet.

Thanet district council supports the idea of night flights but pacified local objectors with the promise of a six-month public consultation. However, while the consultation was running, the Campaign to Protect Rural England found that EUjet was offering tickets for flights landing after midnight this summer. Clearly it was under the impression that a public consultation was nothing to worry about.

And in fact it wasn't. As soon as EUjet received its international flight slots, the consultation was curtailed and Thanet council gave temporary permission for night flights from April to September to "secure the future" of the airline. A consultation on whether to renew the permission is now being held.

In fact expansion at Manston has largely flown under the planning radar. When it ceased to be a military site, the civil operator Planestation was simply granted certificates of lawfulness. With the arrival of EUjet and the construction of a new cargo depot, the site now covers 20 hectares, even though no environmental impact assessment has ever been carried out.

Elsewhere in Kent, meanwhile, campaigners against the expansion of Lydd Airport (see *Eye* 1130) have discovered where the money is coming from for the operator's plans to expand to a "two million passenger a year capability by 2010".

Sheikh Fahad al-Athel acquired a controlling 70 percent interest in the airport in 2001 and has since invested millions to upgrade facilities. He also owns the neighbouring golf course outright. The sheikh has featured in these pages before: he was a director of Al Bilad (UK) alongside former treasury minister and convicted perjurer Jonathan Aitken.

In 1989 Aitken arranged for al-Athel to get 15 per cent commission (illegal under Saudi business law) if he persuaded the Saudi regime to buy £400m worth of helicopter weaponry from British arms firm BMARC, part of the immense defence contract known as "Al Yamamah". Aitken and the government would go on to deny having paid bribes to clinch the deals.

CATHAY PACIFIC

FIVE Cathay Pacific pilots can have access to British employment rights after all thanks to a ruling in the appeal court. The decision has implications for a plethora of offshore workers and people employed in international transport.

The five pilots were among the 49 sacked by Cathay during the 2001 work-to-rule by the Pilots Association over pay and hours (*Eye* 1057). The pilots were never given proper written reasons for their dismissal and have challenged the airline in the courts of several countries.

The pilots who won the ruling on 19 May had contracts of employment with Veta Ltd, a subsidiary of Cathay Pacific based at Heathrow, which allowed the airline to employ pilots who lived in Europe, rather than have to pay higher salaries to pilots based in expensive Hong Kong.

At an earlier tribunal Cathay had argued that despite this, the nature of the job meant the pilots' work was mainly outside the UK and they were thus not covered by the employment relations act. They could thus be sacked willy-nilly, since no one had jurisdiction to do anything about it.

PRISONS

Mourne in mourning

WHAT is the point of prison inspectors if their criticisms, reports and recommendations are completely ignored?

Nearly three years ago the chief inspector of prisons visited Northern Ireland's only women's jail, Mourne House, which was then set inside Maghaberry high security men's prison in Co Antrim. Her report was scathing of a regime that left vulnerable women and their children locked in their cells for hours on end with little access to education or activity, where healthcare was dire and where women who self-harmed were punished in the segregation block.

The report made nearly 50 recommendations for change, including a fundamental shift which should have seen Mourne House become a separate women's jail managed independently of the men's prison. But inspectors have recently returned to Northern Ireland and found that not only have virtually none of the recommendations been carried out, but the treatment of women inmates has actually deteriorated.

Following two suicides at Mourne House and another critical report (this time from the Northern Ireland human rights committee) the NI prison service had decided to move the women out to a male young offender unit, Hydebank Wood, in Belfast. But conditions there were worse. The women lost access to fresh air and open grounds and had no in-cell sanitation. Child protection procedures were also inadequate, and inspectors found two vulnerable and suicidal prisoners – one a child – in unfurnished and cold cells. Educational needs were not being met.

In its report at the end of last month, the inspectorate criticised severe and inappropriate punishments and the women's harsh treatment. Effectively damning prison service chiefs, the report said: "We do not believe that this was because staff deliberately wished to treat their charges badly, rather it was because they genuinely did not know how to manage these young women and were extremely anxious, by any means available, to prevent another self-inflicted death."

The NI prison service claimed that since the inspection last November, there had been "immense progress" and the regime was moving in the right direction. But not fast enough, according to prison watchers.

Martin smarting?

FEATURED on the back cover of the promotional brochure of Sodhexho, the Paris-based multinational which owns UK Detention Services, is Martin Narey, chief executive of the troubled national offender management services (Noms).

Quoted at the opening of Bronzefield, a new women's prison in Ashfield, Middlesex, run by UKDS, he says: "I was vehemently anti-private prisons at one point and I was absolutely wrong. I think this is probably at the cutting edge of the care and custody of women anywhere in the world... it has extraordinary potential in terms of changing peoples' lives.

"I can see countless examples of where the company has spent money they didn't need to do... I think this could be an extraordinarily successful institution."

With reports that John "Blue Skies" Birt has been telling Tony Blair that Narey isn't up to the Noms task, can this shameless piece of grovelling have anything to do with the possibility that Narey may be job hunting?

FINANCIAL REGULATION

Kari on regardless

TWO years ago, following Enron and other scandals, the government made much of its initiative to beef up regulation of the accountancy profession, pointing to the role that the fiercely independent financial services authority (FSA) would play in its investigations.

Now the FSA has announced who will be responsible for this with the creation of an accounting and auditing team to be run by one of its directors, Kari Hale.

Eye readers may recall that Hale was recruited a year ago by FSA chief executive and former Arthur Andersen partner John Tiner from another of the big accountancy firms, Deloitte.

At the same time as announcing its new accountancy supreme, the FSA also appointed a head of its banking team. He is Thomas Huertas, recruited last year from, er, Citibank – the outfit that is still being investigated for dumping £8bn worth of government bonds on the London market, making £10m profit in seconds. Recent reports suggest the bank is trying to cut a deal in return for admitting the relatively minor offence of having inadequate controls rather than face a more serious charge of market manipulation.

The first "new" Labour government came to power promising to end ineffectual self-regulation in the financial sector by setting up the FSA. Eight years on, with no sign of the city having been brought into line and a "light touch" all the rage once again, it looks like the good old days never really went away for the bankers and bean-counters.

PS: Last month the FSA also turned to business to conduct its "ground-breaking study to measure the real costs of financial regulation" as part of a project to find regulations that can be cut. The assignment was handed to Deloitte, marking a happy reconciliation with the FSA since the firm's £750,000 fine for a botched pensions mis-selling review by its "wealth management" arm last year. Just the firm to find some tiresome regulations to cut.

PPS: Head of Deloitte in the UK, managing partner Martin Scicluna, is to be hauled before the accountants' disciplinary body to answer accusations that he failed to report one of his partners who has already been de-frocked for taking a bribe of a Range Rover while consenting to a client's dodgy accounts. News of alleged misconduct at the top of the firm only came out a few weeks ago after the high court overturned efforts by Deloitte to prevent *Accountancy Age* magazine reporting them.

MIS-SOLD ENDOWMENTS

Pedigree chump

ABBEY National's record £800,000 fine for having "singularly failed to treat its customers fairly" is particularly embarrassing for the company's chairman, Lord Terry Burns.

The financial services authority (FSA) found that for nearly four years on Burns' watch the building society-turned-bank rejected thousands of complaints from customers who had been mis-sold endowment policies when it should have accepted them, costing its hapless customers tens of millions of pounds.

The offences were compounded by a letter from Abbey to the regulator in 2002 falsely claiming that it was complying with the FSA's advice on handling complaints.

Shabby Abbey's contemptuous attitude to customers and regulators alike is all the more shocking given its chairman's pedigree. Burns was permanent secretary at the treasury in 1997 when the department launched a swingeing attack on the mis-selling of private pensions in the 1980s and 90s. He was also until recently an influential member of the Lords' economic affairs committee, one of whose reports called for more confidence in the financial services industry.

Since retiring from the treasury in 1998 Lord Burns has remained a government favourite, having been called in to sort out everything from fox-hunting to the Football Association. In the more lucrative private sector he has just accepted the top job at Marks & Spencer and is also a director of Welsh Water, Pearson and British Land.

With his numerous boardroom positions keeping the wolf from the door, Burns retains his intellectual edge as president of the Society of Business Economists, fellow of the London Business School, companion of the Institute of Management, governor of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research and vice-president of the Royal Economic Society.

Such indispensability to government, business and academia clearly leaves Sir Terry far too busy to worry about incidentals like whether the bank he chairs does the right thing by the thousands of customers it has ripped off over the years.

PUB HOUSES

Say cheers

SOME good news from Gloucestershire where fashion tycoon George Davies (pictured) has given up on plans to convert the only pub in the village of Bourton-on-the-Hill into housing.

More and more pubs are being lost as developers cash in on the property market by claiming the pubs are no longer viable businesses and applying for permission to convert them into housing (*Eyes passim*). But Bourton villagers, the local parish council and the Campaign for Real Ale defeated the plan to convert the Horse and Groom – a classical Georgian building made of Cotswold stone – into a three-storey country mansion worth a mint.

The planning application was submitted by Davies' wife Fiona, who claimed the pub was failing, with takings of just £66 a week. CAMRA pointed out that this just might have something to do with the fact that it was only being opened for 11 hours a week and had stopped serving food.

Davies, whose fortune is estimated at around £115m, withdrew the application in a letter to Cotswold district council saying that "in the short to medium term" villagers would be given the opportunity to "use this facility which they have been so vociferous about".

The victory should give heart to many other communities fighting similar battles. In the village of Ireleth, Cumbria, locals are trying to save the Bay Horse Inn from being converted into housing. The owners, who ran it as a pub for just a few months after buying it in 2002 for £60,000, say it is not a viable business. Nonsense, says the parish council, which has received a letter from someone saying they want to buy it and run it as a pub. Barrow district council was due to decide on planning permission in May, but deferred the application to 21 June.

MARINE POLUTION

Foul-mouth harbour?

A FISHY smell is hanging over Falmouth harbour – but it's not from anything hauled up in a net. It emanates from the office of the Falmouth harbour commissioners (FHC), responsible for running the Cornish port.

The FHC is strange beast, a "trust port corporation" which manages to be both a public body and a private company at the same time. It owes its existence to an 1870 act of parliament which was intended to ensure that the harbourmaster had someone to report to and could be held to account for his actions.

In recent years the line separating the roles of the harbourmaster and FHC has become increasingly blurred, leading to complaints that the FHC is a law unto itself. Falmouth's current harbourmaster, Captain Mark Sansom, also happens to be chief executive of the harbour commissioners. Who appointed him harbourmaster? Why, the FHC. This presumably was not the type of accountability envisaged.

The commissioners have encountered local hostility after deciding to allow Russian oil tankers to carry out ship-to-ship transfers of crude oil within Falmouth Bay, just two miles off the coast. This is despite the fact that the area is part of the Fal and Helford special area of conservation (SAC) – a site of international significance for marine conservation – in an area of outstanding natural beauty and one of Cornwall's premier tourist destinations.

Russian oil can only come out of the Baltic in small tankers, as its waters are so shallow. Once in open waters the cargoes of several small tankers can be combined in a single super-tanker for transportation further afield. Previously such operations took place in Lyme Bay, off the Devon and Dorset coast, but they ceased when both county councils acknowledged that there were huge environmental and financial risks and negligible economic gain. The financial risk arises from the fact that local councils have to foot the bill for clean-up operations after a spill, with little chance of recouping the full cost – such as the devastating impact on tourism – from oil companies' insurance funds.

The EU is keen to see such transfer operations moved well away from sensitive inshore waters and is bringing in new legislation to achieve this. But it will not apply to areas under the jurisdiction of local harbour authorities such as Falmouth, which provide an effectual loophole for ship-to-ship transfers to continue close to shore.

Should a big spill occur, the consequences would be devastating for the tourist industry, for the fishermen of Falmouth and other ports, and for marine life.

The FHC is sanguine about the risks of such operations because, while it stands to gain from the levies from each oil transfer, it will not be responsible for the clean-up bill should any spillage occur. As things stand, it is the duty of county and district councils to have oil-spill response plans and equipment in place in anticipation of a marine accident, not harbour authorities.

The company currently contracted to develop oil-spill response measures for the Falmouth area is a local outfit called Triskel Marine Ltd, which receives funds from the county council and the EU. If beefed-up emergency plans and equipment were needed for Falmouth, Triskel Marine would be well placed to benefit. Among those Triskel could call on for their expertise and knowledge of Falmouth harbour is one of its directors… Captain Mark Sansom, harbourmaster and chief executive of Falmouth harbour commissioners…

ROYAL MAIL

The cheque is in the post

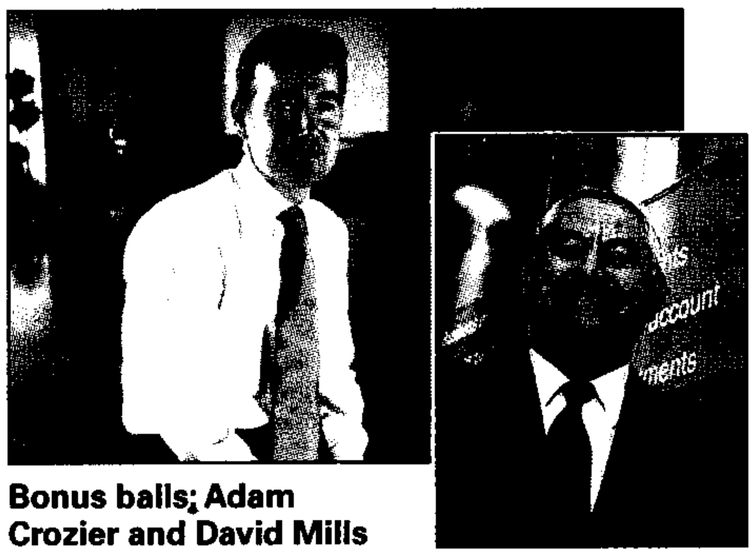
HOW did the captains of industry who were drafted in to turn around Royal Mail earn their enormous bonuses?

Chief executive Adam Crozier was rewarded very close to the maximum 75 percent of his salary by hitting the group's financial targets even though several quality targets were missed. Meanwhile Post Office chief executive David Mills received a parsimonious 98 percent of his maximum mainly by hitting quality targets even though his company lost more money than in the previous year.

Conveniently (and unusually for a thrusting commercial company), the Post Office's poor financial performance played no part in determining Mills' windfall.

What really brought home the bacon for Crozier and Mills, however, was another lottery rollover-style bonus pot called the long-term incentive plan, approved by former trade secretary Patricia Hewitt. Over three years the directors received earmarked contributions to this pot and could also put some of their annual payouts into it. When Royal Mail reported bumper profits at the end of the three years this March, all their shares of the pot were doubled, giving Crozier £1.85m and Mills £948,000, and taking their total packages to £2.5m and £1.3m respectively. (Both can also treat themselves the £1,000 "share in success" payment given to all the posties).

The *Eye* asked why David Mills should receive a £1m bonus based on the financial performance of the Royal Mail group when his part of it was incurring greater losses and was told that the arrangements recognised his position on the Royal Mail board. So that's all right then.



Bonus balls; Adam Crozier and David Mills

Ex-banker Mills memorably described his employer to parliament last year as "the last bastion of nationalisation" for which "we are seeing the last throes of a terminal whale". How fortunate for him that the whale is spouting seven-figure bonuses for the boss while it makes eight-figure losses.

ANGLIA WATER

Rubble trouble

MORE evidence emerges of Anglia Water Group's (AWG) farcical attempts to run the country's probation hostels.

A damning investigation into the way it handled an asbestos scare at Town Moor, a probation hostel in South Yorkshire, found that the company didn't have a clue about the risks posed by asbestos, nor how to identify, contain and remove it.

AWG picked a contractor to deal with the problem who was based 200 miles away and promptly breached regulations. The work done to remove and replace the ceiling in question was also "unsatisfactory", with rubble left lying around.

Afterwards the building had to be closed for a full environmental clean-up, but only after staff had become very alarmed at their possible exposure to asbestos. In fact they needn't have worried.

The independent inquiry, by surveyors and consulting engineers Pick Everard, found no proof of asbestos boarding in the ceiling in the first place. "There are no records or reports available that independently confirm that the ceiling contained asbestos material," the report concluded. "A verbal report of contamination has not been substantiated by tests results or survey reports… The total expenditure has therefore been unnecessary and has been committed inappropriately." Brilliant!

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **DEBBIE STOREY:** The mother with Asperger Syndrome whose children were nearly taken into care and whose kidney cancer went undiagnosed for months because medical and social services staff were "blinded" by her condition, has died.

Debbie Storey's appalling treatment by the "caring" services was recently highlighted in the *Eye*, shortly after she was diagnosed with a rare renal cancer from which her brother was also suffering. Readers will recall that more than once, even though she was in extreme pain, she was sent home from hospital with just pain killers. On one occasion questions were even asked about whether her Aspergers could affect her perception of pain.

After a direct intervention by her mother, the oncologist who was treating Debbie's brother agreed to see Debbie. He found that she not only had the same type of cancer as her brother but that hers had spread.

Debbie Storey's death came just after she had won a mammoth battle to stop Essex social services from taking her two sons, Ben, 16, and Sam, 12 – who also have Asperger Syndrome – into care after an unqualified therapist decided the children were being psychologically abused. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

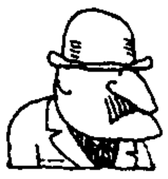
■ **HARRY STANLEY:** Sir Ian Blair, head of Scotland Yard, cannot say he wasn't warned that it was wrong to reinstate the two police officers involved in the fatal shooting of Harry Stanley before the crown prosecution service had decided whether or not to bring charges against them.

Eye readers will remember that Sir Ian made his announcement – that the two firearms officers, Inspector Neil Sharman and PC Kevin Fagan, were to return to duty – only 24 hours after the Independent Police Complaints Commission had advised against the move, saying he was prejudging the case.

Blair was anxious to head off further protests from the officers' colleagues who had downed weapons. But now that Sharman and Fagan have been arrested on suspicion of murder, gross negligence manslaughter and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, he will again be accused of placing his officers above the law if he fails to suspend them.

Mr Stanley, 46, was recovering from cancer and walking home from the pub carrying a newly repaired table-leg in a plastic bag when he was shot in the head and hand. Police had been wrongly tipped off that the Scotsman was in fact an Irishman carrying a gun.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017



In the City

THE increasing distance between the picture Regal Petroleum presented to the stock market about its supposed "considerable" Greek offshore oil field and the dry well reality is raising increasing questions about chairman Frank Timis' credibility.

Those questions could well see Timis forced off the Regal board – as he was also invited to leave his Canadian company, Gabriel Resources, two years ago, despite remaining a major shareholder.

Regal shares fell below the 2002 flotation price of 60p for the first time this week after the Greek oil reserves were slashed by 70 percent and it was reported that Timis was under investigation in his former homeland of Romania by investigators fighting corruption and organised crime.

Romania is rated by Transparency International as a land of "rampant corruption". It is also a sphere of influence for Russian and Balkan organised crime. Both problems are supposed to be "solved" before Romania joins the European Union in 2007 – assuming enlargement is still on after the French and Dutch referendums.

"Honestly, I'd love to be able to afford to help you out, but I'm afraid I'm a barrister"

The Timis reputation – such as it may be for a man with three (two admitted) drug convictions – is likely to be further tested by continuing problems in Romania where attempts to develop open-cast gold mines by Gabriel, European Gold and the also Timis-linked International Goldfields have promised much and cost shareholders a great deal but so far failed to produce a gram of gold. Regal also claims to have an "exciting" gas find in Romania.

Just how Timis and friends obtained those mining and gas/oil concessions is subject to close examination by the opponents of the mining and the local authorities. There are considerable suspicions surrounding the role and influence of Timis' close associate, businessman and former Gabriel director Ovidiu Tender, a frequent travelling companion of the then Romanian president Ion Iliescu. Tender is under investigation over the privatisation of one of the largest Romanian oil refineries in which Timis lent a helping hand.

Regal later employed a former senior official of the National Agency for Mineral Resources that awarded the mining concessions. Investigators in Romania uncovered allegations of payments and cars given to local union officials to support the mining projects. There are also suspect links between Tender and Timis and former senior intelligence officials who have considerable influence in Romania.

Some of these matters played a role in the decision by Gabriel Resources in 2003 to carry out an investigation of Timis, its chairman and major shareholder. A firm of American private investigators was paid some £400,000 to probe Timis' background. Their report was not published but the company subsequently declared that "the prior conduct of Mr Timis had no material adverse effect on the company and in particular on the validity of its interest in the (gold) project". Gabriel also stated that "the company's affairs had been and are being conducted in accordance with all applicable laws in all material respects and that the allegations of illegal and improper conduct made by Mr Hickson [Robin Hickson, former president] were unfounded".

Quite so. However, the report into Timis was hardly complimentary. It effectively accused him of lying to the Toronto stock exchange about his past in Australia where he arrived as a refugee/immigrant in 1980.

Timis was alleged to have hidden both a 1986 personal bankruptcy and the 1996 collapse of his company, the original Gabriel Resources, in a sworn statutory declaration regarding personal information given to the Toronto regulators in April 2001. A similar sworn declaration was also provided that month to the Canadian venture exchange. A personal information declaration was also made to the British Columbia securities commission.

The report into this sworn Toronto stock exchange statement compared Timis's version with public records in western Australia. It found many claimed contradictions and omissions. Far from a being successful businessman as he suggested, the report declared that in reality Timis had been "a failed self-employed truck driver, a drug addict, a drug dealer, the proprietor of a takeaway pizza shop, the director of several non-trading or unsuccessful companies and then a failed gold miner".

Its conclusion was stark. The resumé, it said, contained "many untruths" and the stated business history from 1980 to 1996 was termed "a complete fabrication". The sworn document was described in conclusion as "fraught with falsehood" and the information "vague at best but at worst it is downright dishonest".

No doubt Timis disagreed and explained any discrepancies as accidental or the result of a genuine misunderstanding. After all, it is said he invited the investigation and maintained he had nothing to hide. And Gabriel did not make any material criticism of its former chairman. Indeed it paid him a £500,000 golden good-bye and retained him as a consultant with share options.

Still, it would be interesting to compare any similar cv provided by Timis ahead of the AIM listing for Regal in 2002 with the Toronto document of 2001 and the conclusions of the Gabriel report of 2003. A confidential report containing Timis' cv, which he made available last year, contained information provided both to the Toronto and Vancouver stock exchanges which the Gabriel report claimed was "a lie".

Given what was admitted by Timis about his criminal convictions for heroin possession, plus what had happened at Gabriel and what had emerged in Romania through the inquiries of the local Centre for Investigative Journalism and other local journalists, as well as the NGOs opposing the gold mining, it is hard to understand why so many top City fund managers were prepared to take Timis and his claims about the Greek oil field on trust at face value. So much so that the Regal share price rose to more than 500p in March this year.

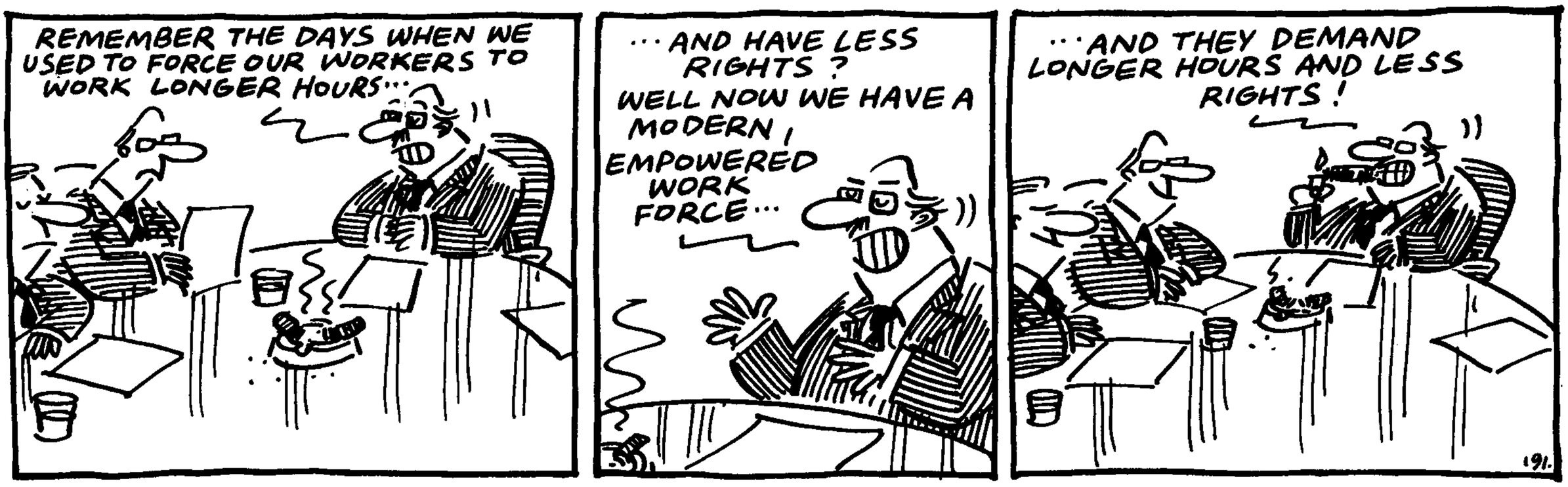
But nobody wants to miss out on a good thing! Witness the current rush to climb aboard the latest bubble – online poker. How else to explain the rush by 13 fund managers and brokers to pay 390p for Regal shares on April 29 when questions had already been raised about the results from its Kallirachi 2 well in the Aegean. It seems that some clearly did not even understand the jargon of the industry they were investing other people's money in. That "low permeability" and "light oil shows" suggested what was confirmed three weeks later, that the well was "non-commercial"? Well bullshit always baffles the quality of what often passes for City brains. Ask those victims of the Australian nickel boom of the late 60s or the Vancouver stock exchange boom of the 80s, not to mention the recent dot-com bubble.

So who were these brains of Britain who pumped £45m of clients' money into Regal just six weeks ago in a placing arranged by the company's brokers Evolution for shares now worth £7.5m? Bozo of the year award goes to Merrill Lynch Investment Managers who took more than half (7.48m) of the 11.5m shares on offer. Their clients invested £29m and now show a loss of more than £24m.

Henderson Global Investors paid £6m for 1.55m shares now worth £1m! But then Henderson is the largest Regal institutional holder with 20m shares or almost 16 percent of the company – a near £80m investment in April worth £13m in June!

Other long-standing Friends of Frank also did not want to miss out. America's Capital Group took 670,000 to go over 6m. Germany's Commerzbank Securities took 575,000 to top 5m. Fund manager Artemis took 210,000. Other six-figure takers included Cross Asset Management, Mint, RAB Capital and the University Superannuation Pension Fund – some £600,000 now worth £100,000, as if pension deficits weren't big enough already!

The rest of the lucky placees included Savoy

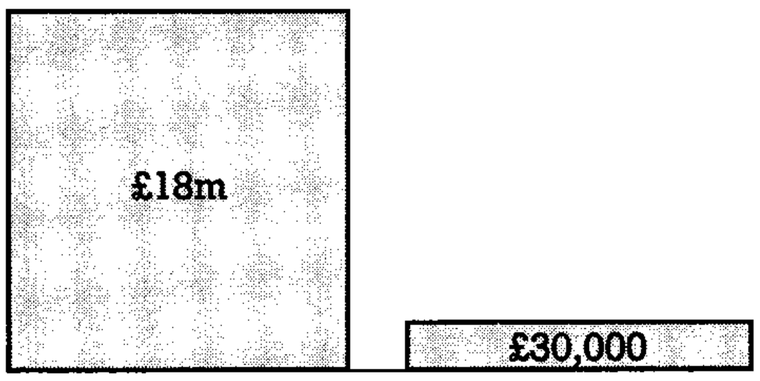

REMEMBER THE DAYS WHEN WE USED TO FORCE OUR WORKERS TO WORK LONGER HOURS...
...AND HAVE LESS RIGHTS ?
WELL NOW WE HAVE A MODERN, EMPOWERED WORK FORCE...
...AND THEY DEMAND LONGER HOURS AND LESS RIGHTS !
191.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Not too bright

Noah Freedman and Steve Dodd's "Brainspark plc"



What was raised from investors five years ago

What those shares are worth now

Asset Management, headed by former chancellor Ken Clarke and which paid £136,500 for 35,000 shares. Similar five-figure holdings went to the Swiss Pictet Asset Management, brokers Fiske and SG Asset Management.

The fund managers concerned will all trot out the usual nonsense about how Regal is just one of hundreds of shares in their portfolios and that investors/clients have to look at the big picture and speculate to accumulate.

No doubt the clients of these would-be masters of the investment universe pay performance fees for their share-picking expertise. When the dust around Regal and Timis finally settles, perhaps they should be asking for a refund.

NEWS that the government has decided to appoint inspectors from the Department of Timidity & Inaction to probe the MG Rover collapse is unlikely to fill the Phoenix Five with fear.

The use of outside inspectors – a method fallen into disrepute because of the lengthy delays over Maxwell, Guinness and TransTec to name but three of many – ensures no report will appear for one or two years and will be subject to all kinds of legal manoeuvres and likely delays in publication.

Which is exactly what the Dear Leader, his Iron Chancellor and hapless former trade secretary Patricia Hewitt, along with her predecessor Stephen Byers, want. Now any demands for answers about why "new" Labour backed John Towers and his crew in the first place and continued to offer and spend taxpayers' money to keep them in business until the Chinese would-be rescuers pulled the plug can be safely batted away with the explanation that nothing should be said or done to prejudice the DTI inquiry!

Whether that will prevent or delay any probe by the national audit office (NAO) into ministers' conduct remains to be seen. As does what wrongdoing was committed other than for Towers and Co to line and ringfence their pockets while Rover hid the skids. So far the liquidators are said to have found none and greed sadly is not yet a crime.

Even the question of whether MG Rover was trading while insolvent is far from clear cut. Yes the company was running out of cash and probably technically bust for several months before the end. But so long as Towers could point to the continuing rescue talks with Shanghai Automotive, the company was able to say it would pay its bills when they became due – the criminal test. Only if it could be shown that the directors knew that the Chinese deal was not or never was on could it be said that they were trading while insolvent.

And that could be hard to prove. Especially as the government was trying so hard to ensure the Chinese did come to the rescue with Blair and Brown lobbying Beijing and the treasury and DTI offering VAT holidays and other financial support. So ironically it could even be that the DTI may have undermined the chance of any prosecution emanating from its own investigation.

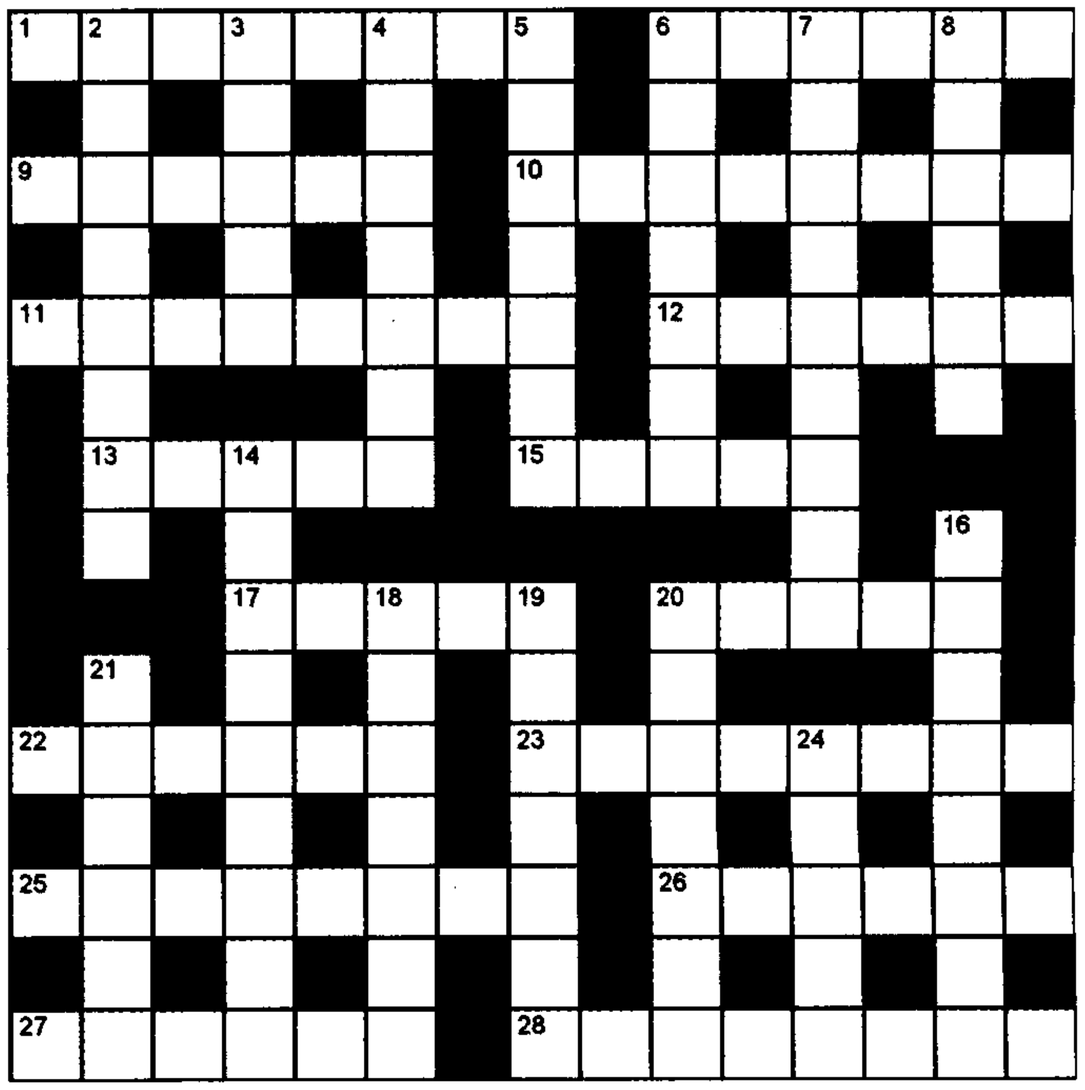
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 289

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 17 June 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/6ac. Conservative's ultimate late defection upset? The party's having to get used to it (8,6)
9 Don't be an outsider: finally get penis operated on (4,2)
10 Buggering mystery about end of Conservatism; it means Left and Right are just the same (8)
11 Addictive substance, Viagra? (4,4)
12 See 24 Down
13 Bill gets excited grabbing Monica's butt (5)
15 'Squidgy's' yen: head from 'Jammy' (5)
17 Of sound constitution, is nervous of Seventies' tops making a comeback (5)
20 She professes to be a different sort of feminist, one in favour of going topless (5)
22 Not out of place as one having sex, framed by sleazy *Sun* (2,4)
23 Cate Blanchett's first lie, perhaps: "Not having any of it" (8)
25 Held by dominatrix to be bollocks by parliamentarian (8)
26 Barking audio equipment component? (6)
27 Showy Gordon wants Tony's end (6)
28 Looked forward to by would-be king Charles, "getting wotsit augmented by Atkinson" (8)

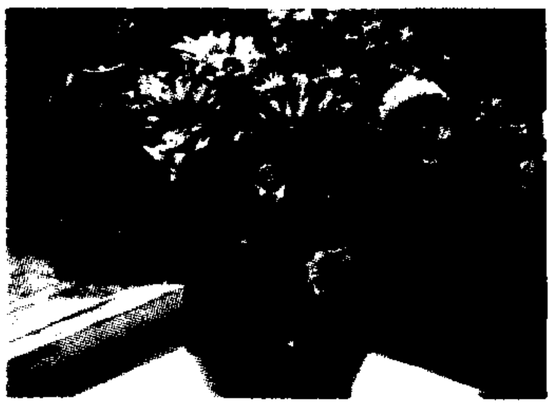
DOWN

2 Tendency to just sit on arse is hindrance to hot S. American, according to tabloid (8)
3 Archer's mass of primitive instincts following 'jug' accommodation? (5)
4 Boozers accepting 'aving an erection shows guts (7)
5 Posy has not a single Home Counties homosexual (7)
6 In the embrace of crude Monica – hellish! (7)
7 Gratuitous sex, to your lesbian eventually starts to be not confined to breast stroke (9)
8 Out-and-out head from Chris on the telly (6)
14 Try to slice off balls (9)
16 Of the state of IRA, enter "in a mess" (8)
18 Bad Radio 4 presenter, i.e. to be replaced by Jeremy at last (7)
19 Where you could find a joystick's knob - mine (7)
20 Rift with Evelyn reportedly badly conducted by Saddam (4,3)
21 Periodically do away with entertaining Labour's number two (6)
24/12ac. Sniffing an opening as a yes-man? (5-6)

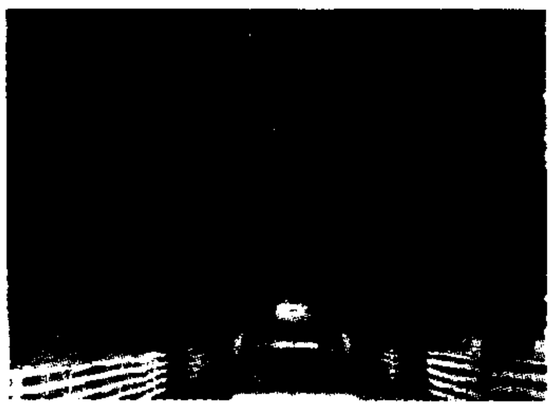
Crossword 288 winner: ALISTAIR MACKENZIE

ACROSS: 1/5D Reduced majority 5 Milady 8 Action 9 Hijacker 10 Baby boomer 12 Liam 13 Idea 14 Buttocks 17 Paul Foot 19 Babe 22 Fart 24 Gerry Adams 25 Claimant 27 Tumble 28 Stodge 29 Eleanor.

DOWN: 1/26/23 Richard the Third 2 Daily Mail 3 Condom 4 Doh 6 Local 7 Die back 11 Mobster 15 Ombudsman 16 Roughage 18 A bad lot 20 Bumbler 21 Eyetie.

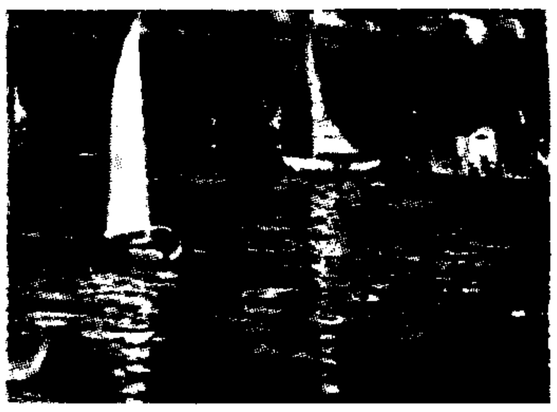


Jigsaw 1
"Garden Bouquet"



Jigsaw 2
"The Avenue"

Jigsaw 3
"Trooping the Colour"



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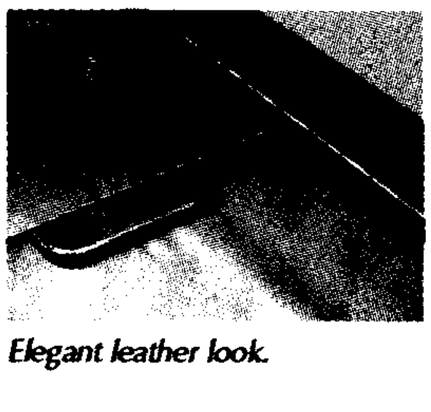

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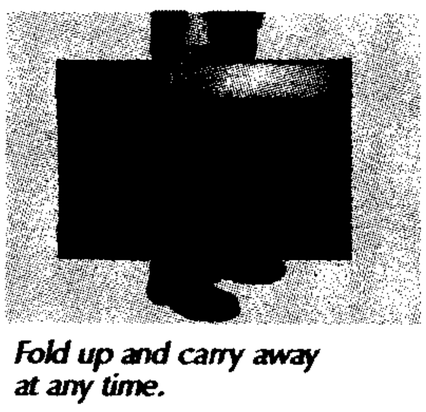

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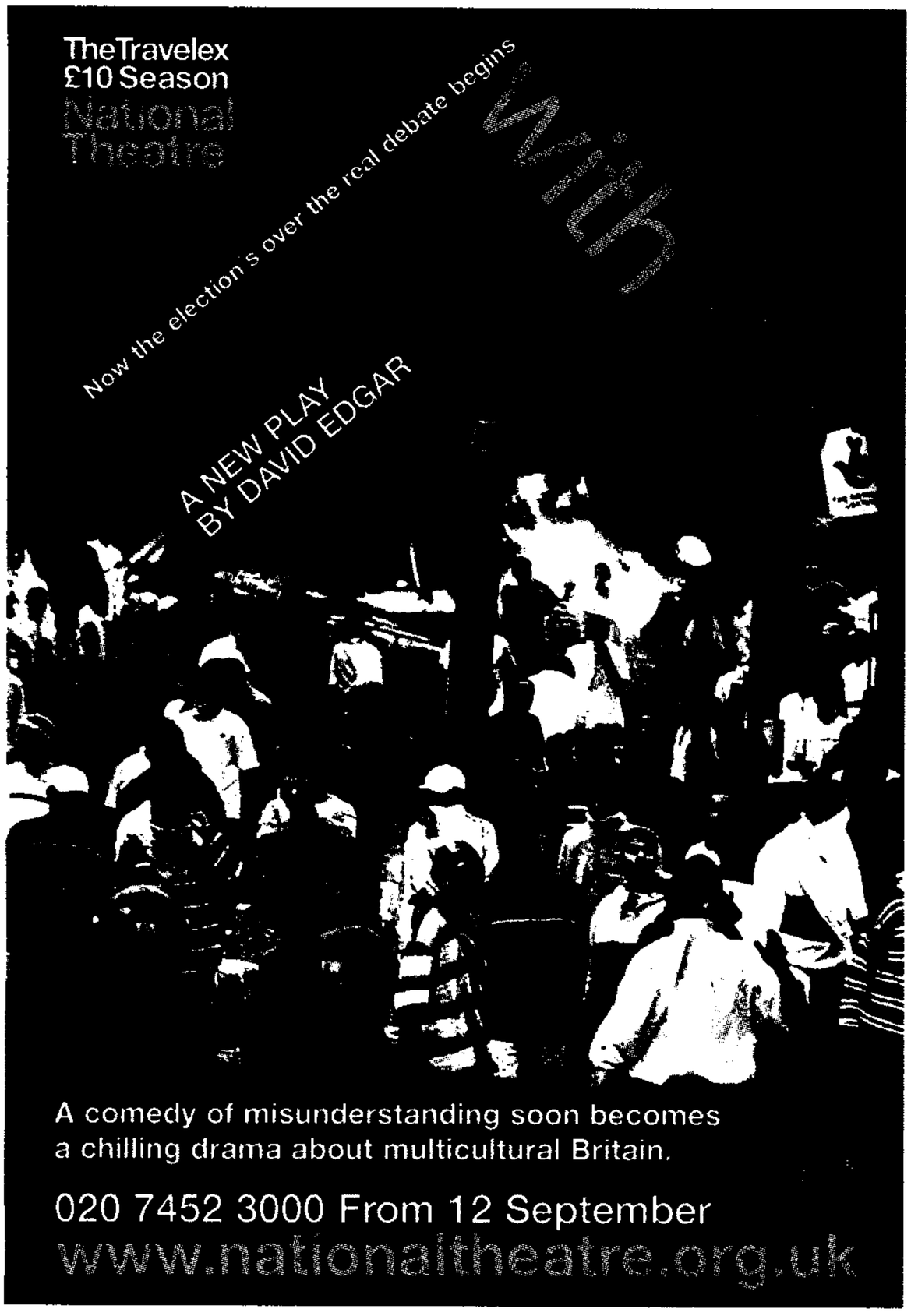
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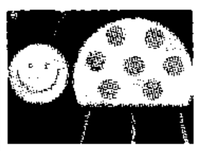

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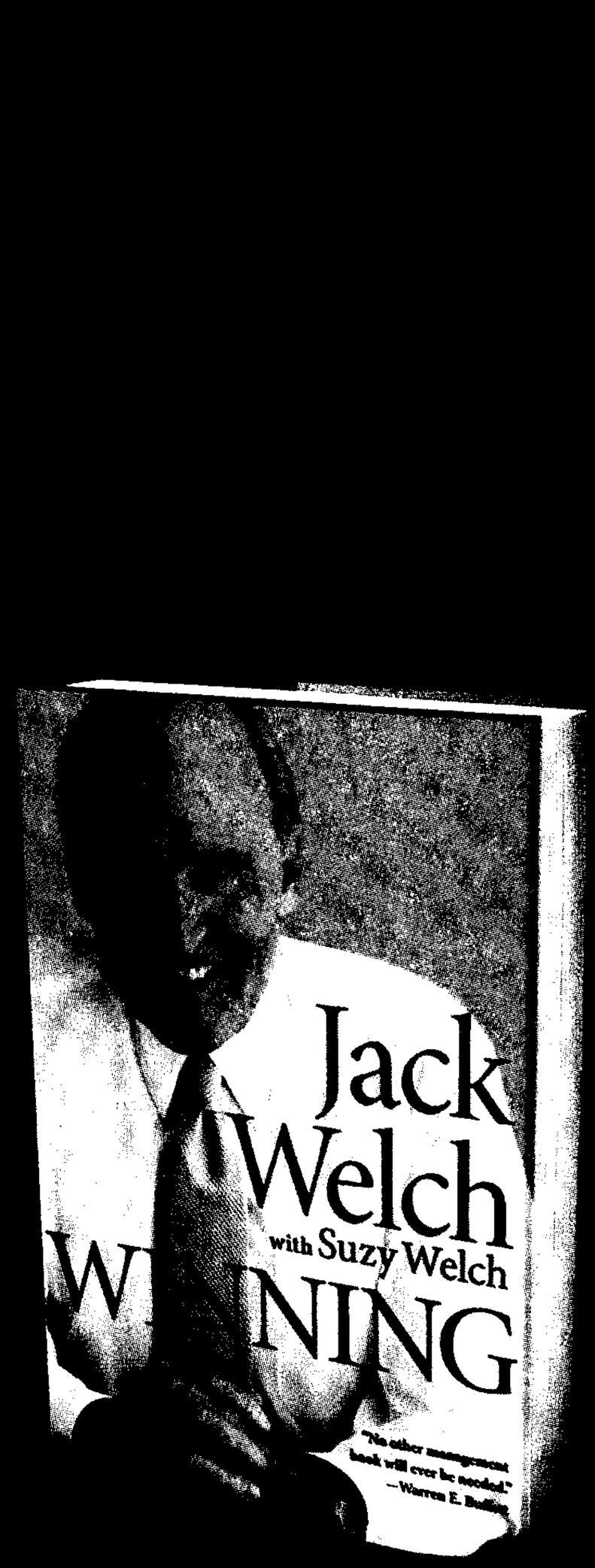

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DEPRESSED EX-SOLDIER, £10K debt, no house. Any help appreciated, thanks. S/C: 82-61-18. A/C: 552954.

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LOVELY 60S LADY, absolutely fed up having no money and no man. Surely someone can help. Please? Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-94-91. A/C: 00523108. Reply Box 132322.

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22-YEAR-OLD FARM BOY; can't hack rat race! 10K pleeeeaase! TSB, S/C: 77-62-09. A/C: 15210168.

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£16K URGENTLY NEEDED to keep child at school. Any help appreciated. S/C: 30-11-75. A/C: 01240155.

PLEASE HELP TO REPAY crippling debts. Many thanks. Reply Box 133211.

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PLEASE HELP my abused daughter finance herself after leaving. HSBC, S/C: 40-24-27. A/C: 51163213. Thank you.

PLEASE COULD SOMEONE send me a tenner? Thanks. HSBC, S/C: 40-10-26. A/C: 61431102.

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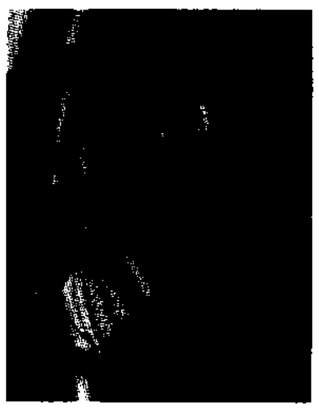

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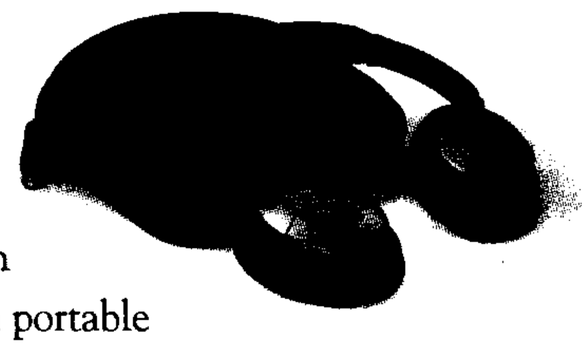

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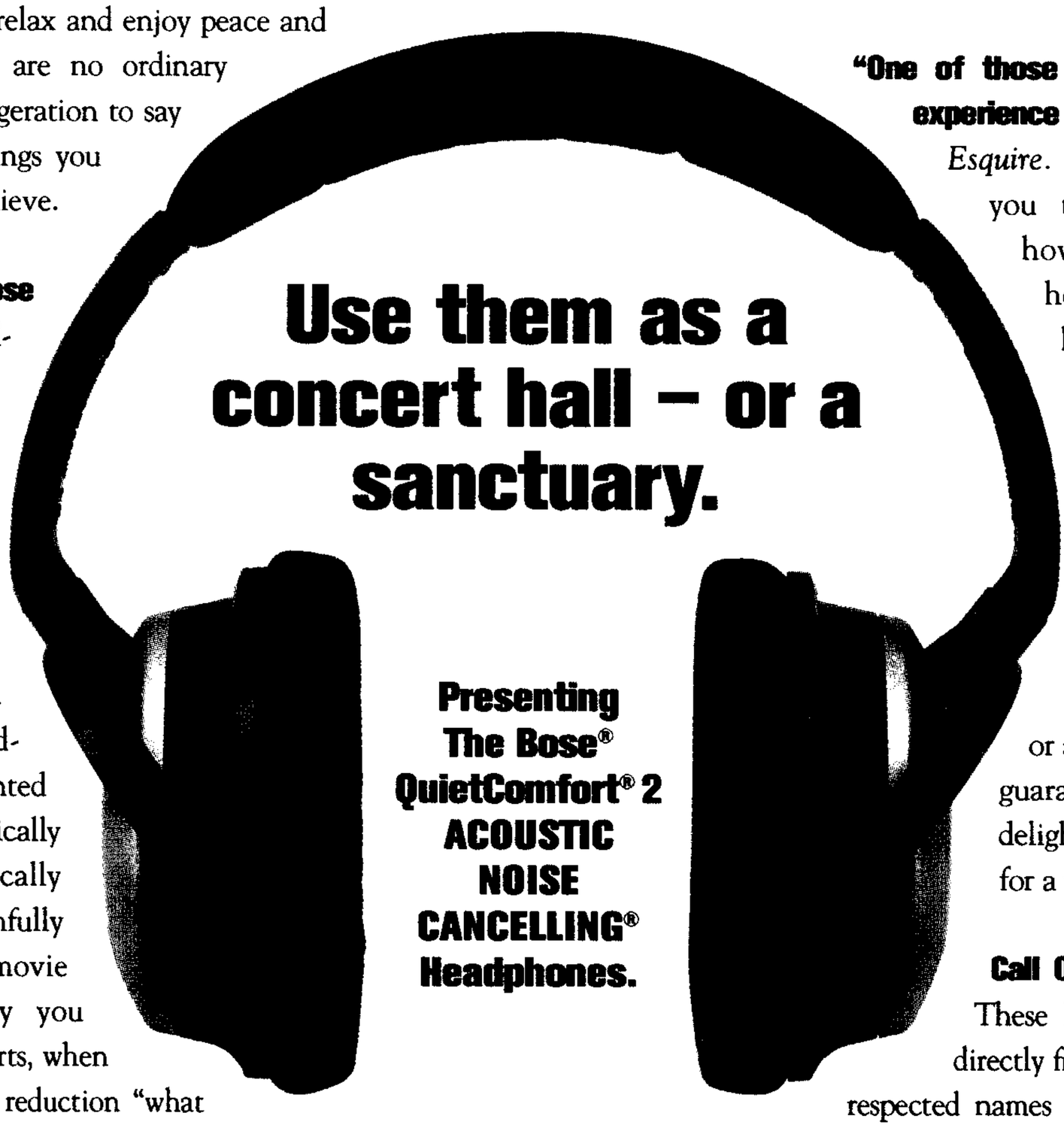

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